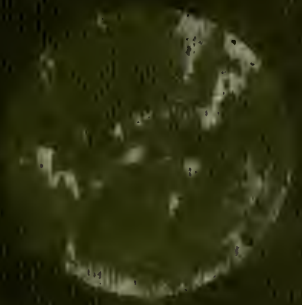
CHILDREN OF NO MAN'S LAND



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CHILDREN OF NO MAN'S LAND

CHILDREN OF NO MAN'S LAND

BY

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'PANTOMIME,' 'SEE-SAW,' 'TWOS AND THREES'
'GRAND CHAIN,' 'A MARRYING MAN'

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"What is love of one's land? . . .
I don't know very well.
It is something that sleeps for a year, for a day,
For a month, something that keeps
Very hidden and quiet and still,
And then takes
The quiet heart like a wave,
The quiet brain like a spell,
The quiet will
Like a tornado, and that shakes
The whole being and soul . . .
Aye, the whole of the soul."

FORD MADOX HUEFFER

CHILDREN OF NO MAN'S LAND

PART I

CHAPTER I

I

"LET her go," said Ferdinand Marcus. "I want my daughter to have a good time."

Aunt Stella assented. "Why shouldn't she go? Anything for a change, when one is twenty-three. Anything for excitement. And she can come to no harm. Besides, Richard is invited too."

"No harm," chirruped her brother. "Liberty for the young! We have missed enough, Stella, you and I, through old-fashioned prejudices."

Old Hermann Marcus did not join in the conversation. He sat heavy and immovable; his faded blue eyes, under their fierce ridges, travelling contemptuously from his son to his daughter. Weaklings! short-sighted weaklings, with their foolish chatter of "liberty for the young." Was this the way to bring up one's children, with authority trailing like a slack rope along the floor? What was to become of the old, if the young were allowed to live for their own pleasure? Where would he be now, he, Hermann Marcus, crippled with rheumatism, financially insolvent, approaching his eightieth birthday, if Ferdinand and Stella had not been trained, very carefully trained, to unquestioning obedience and duty?

He was impotent where Ferdinand's children were concerned. His day of authority was over. But—"a good time," he muttered. "They will see. . . ." He called loudly to Stella to bring him at once the English papers, which would not arrive at the Swiss hotel for fully an hour yet. Hermann Marcus was perfectly aware of this.

II

"But everyone knows for a positive fact that Shakespeare is the greatest writer of all. Why, who has ever heard of your Goethe, outside Germany?"

"And who has ever read your Shakespeare, inside England?" Lothar retorted, with the horrid glee of a person who has made a remark with an unpleasant amount of truth in it. His spectacles gleamed, two round, triumphant dazzles in the sunset which streamed through the closed windows of his study.

Richard repeated stubbornly, but without conviction: "Everyone knows Shakespeare is the greatest writer." His defence of Shakespeare was strictly impersonal; he had no vehement sentiments on the subject; the whole argument bored him. But on principle, when a German boy asserts that Goethe is greater than Shakespeare, the English boy can have no option but to make reply that Shakespeare is greater than Goethe.

"It shall be decided one day," Lothar grimaced ominously.

And Richard had an inspiration. "Shakespeare has been translated into German, because you jolly well couldn't get on without him. I've never seen Goethe properly put into English. That about proves I'm right."

"There was no Englander great enough to translate a man so great. I do not say," Lothar explained conscientiously, "that I have not of the works of your Shakespeare also with much benefit an exhaustive study made. Let us converse on them. Do you then prefer Macbess or Otello?"

"Macbeth," Richard muttered at a venture, and walked restlessly to the window; fidgeted with the beaded blind-cord, to signify that he expected better entertainment from his host than this irritating controversy. He wished his sister had not been so quick to accept Mrs Koch's invitation to visit her at Dorzheim. To be dragged away in the middle of the extra July of summer holiday which an epidemic of scarlet fever at school had procured him; dragged away from a jolly hotel in Switzerland, to this stupid, little, dead-and-alive German town; finally, to be expected to chum up with Lothar von Relling, merely because they were "of the same age"—it was a bit thick!

Deb could quite well have come alone, if this was her idea of enjoyment.

He wondered why Lothar was crossing and uncrossing his legs in their bright striped stockings, and breathing heavily as though about to unburden himself of a confidence.

"Have you a heart's dearest, you?"

Richard Marcus was fifteen. A normal boy, muscular, pugnacious, taciturn. The question drew from him a shout of laughter.

"What should I do with one, if I had it?"

"You English boys are babies all," Lothar said, unexpectedly scornful. "You play always your stupid games, rather than write verses to the loved one. Ach, but she . . ." he whirled his hearer along an incoherent tide of description: "a wonder, a dream, a night of scented dusk," that mysterious goddess who seemed but recently to have emerged from the nebulous glamour which encircles all womanhood for the Teuton yet in his teens.

"Are you engaged to her?" yawned Richard, who by the merest fraction preferred these confidences to the Goethe-Shakespeare debate.

"Betrothed? But not possible. I am already betrothed to Frieda-Marie. Our peoples betrothed us a great many years ago. It is wearisome, but——" Lothar shrugged his plump shoulders—"it is suitable. We are of one faith. Her father, the Herr Sanitäts-Rath Hauffe, will withdraw his sanction if he outfinds anything of my faithlessness."

Richard swung round and surveyed with disfavour Lothar's vague features under their bush of upstanding tow. "Do you mean there's really anything for him to find out about you and the other girl, or are you swanking?"

"Only that I schwärm—I swarm with love for her. I watch in the streets, and once I drop at her feet a fair rose costing fifty pfennig. She knows nothing of my passion. But what goes me that on? It is more beautiful, more ideal, so." Suddenly he slid from lofty altitudes. "One has also one's emotions away from these. One is flesh. One is not altogether air. . . ." He spattered a few inky hints regarding the demands of his adolescence. From a pink, chubby face his spectacles glittered knowingly, inviting his companion to betrayal of like perplexities. But Richard preserved that admirable stolidity for which his looks were so well adapted: powerful jaw, big nose, dark head well thrust forward from the short neck and broad shoulders; and, rather obscured by all

these pugnacities, a pair of pleasant, humorous light-grey eyes, from which now, however, he had chased all expression save of blank idiocy. Not likely he would give himself away to Master Lothar! Richard wondered if there were a German boy good form enough to know that Lothar was bad form, and to ostracize him as such. Unlikely; the fellow would hardly be as cocksure if he had once been put in his place. All this blither about Goethe and girls. . . . "Do you mean to marry this person?" interrupting the other's critical appraisement of a lady professionally well-known in Dorzheim, appraisement to which Lothar had essayed to impart the personal note.

"I have explained," patiently, "I am plighted to Frieda-Marie. She is a good Christian maiden. She learns cooking. She has a respectable gift-along. Why do you smile?"

"Your English is so funny."

"I have not yet had the pleasure of hearing your German," politely sarcastic. For Richard had felt in honour bound not to reveal to Dorzheim that his knowledge of their tongue, though faulty, was fluent enough, as was natural in a grandson of Hermann Marcus of Munich.

"I will take me a wife when I am twenty-seven. First must I be through with my examinations. Then do I perform my military service. You also? No?"

"Oh, we don't have to fag with that sort of thing in England."

"It is for the Fatherland. Also one is attractive in uniform. One dashes. One lives. Me, I must betray a several of maidens before I can afford one to keep."

Richard scowled discouragement. "You're not sixteen yet, are you?"

"At sixteen one is no longer a child. One cannot go mad . . ." To Richard's horror, Lothar suddenly buried his head in his arms, shuddering violently. . . . "That I were dead! that I were dead!" he moaned.

The English boy stared at him. These outbursts of confidence, alternately sentimental and morbid, seemed to emphasize his growing sense of having been brought into a world completely alien. He sent a swift thought to his chum, Greville Dunne, now on board a training-ship; wished old Greville were here. Foreign kids were unbalanced, hysterical; they read too much; brooded too much; talked too much. . . . Lothar had no right to unburden himself to a stranger, of

different nationality and hostile outlook. Richard began to be afraid he had given an impression of too ready sympathy.

Lothar raised his head and announced solemnly: "Swine-hound that I am, believe that I preserve a reverence supreme for my Loved One!" His eyes were swamped in facile tears. "I have no father," he added, after an uncomfortable pause; "and you, you have no mother, I hear."

"Oh, that's all right, thanks," Richard's shoulders were expressive of sullen embarrassment. "Got a stamp collection?"

"I will show you my botany-box." And Lothar littered the blue and red check table-cloth with his specimens of pressed leaves and flowers, neatly labelled. Presently he reverted to the subject of Frieda-Marie. It appeared as though he were trying unsuccessfully to tell Richard something. . . .

"Pity that she should be so blonde. The Ideal One is a brunette. She is a witch; a black velvet pansy. Hark, I will describe her to you."

A full five minutes elapsed, however, before Richard awoke to the fact that the concrete sum of Lothar's lyrical ecstasies made up a personality closely resembling that of his sister.

"Good Lord! Deb!"

"But at last! Since an hour have I tried to reach your understanding."

"Couldn't you say straight out that you meant Deb, instead of making an inventory of her?"

This was too great a strain on Lothar's English. "She was mine from the first moment I saw her feet on the pave-ment my window outside press," he breathed.

"Look here—d'you want to marry Deb?"

"You come me always with that!" peevishly. "I tell you I am betrothed to Frieda-Marie. I cannot marry your sister. She is only a Jewess."

"I like your cheek! Then what's the good of you?"

"I can worship her."

"Umph!"

"You also, you admire her?"

"She's not so dusty."

Again Lothar had to confess himself vanquished. He lugged down an English-German dictionary from the shelf, and con-scientiously looked up 'dusty.'

"Nicht so staubig—ach! . . . Hark, there is Mama who calls us. Doubtless you are fetched to go home."

They ran down the polished stairs, Richard grinning at the notion of being "fetched."

In the drawing-room Felix Koch was apologizing profusely for his wife's absence, while Frau von Relling plied him with coffee and cream cakes and *delicatessen* sandwiches.

"You will be welcome whenever you come again to play with my Lothar," she condescended to Richard. Then sighed heavily: "My big boy!" and took Lothar's hand and fondled it. Lothar received the caress with an expression which was decorously demure. "Smug little humbug!" reflected Richard.

"Indeed, Herr Koch, it is well that the dear Marianna did not call to-day, as it is possible that your honoured Frau Mama might be drinking coffee with me presently."

"So?" Koch nodded gloomily. His wife and his mother were not on speaking terms; and all the town knew why. He had committed an unprecedented folly in marrying the pretty daughter of a shopkeeper in Bingen.

Frau von Relling continued: "Doubtless the dear Marianna is busy with the entertainment of the little English Miss." Then eagerly: "Has she received any offers yet?"

"She has only been with us three days," Koch replied. And added with a mysterious inflection, "But Salzmann has sent to Frankfurt for his brother."

"And how many bouquets?"

"Eleven. And two chocolate-boxes."

"Has Herr Sigismund Koch shown her a little attention?"

The man bent upon his questioner a look of displeasure. "Sigismund knows well he has no concern with any young Miss who is my guest!"

For, though partners in the same bank, he and his younger brother were not on speaking terms. They had quarrelled violently a little while before the death of their father, Emil Koch, founder of the bank, who, with more sense of humour than can usually be accredited to his nation, had left it to them as a joint and firmly-knit inheritance.

Frau von Relling hastened to cover up her intentional piece of malice. "Of course not, of course not. And the dear Marianna will be arranging a Klatsch to introduce the beautiful Miss to Dorzheim?"

"Next Thursday; you will honour us——?"

"Will Wanda be present?" Frau von Relling played nervously with her son's fingers, which she still retained.

"I believe your Fräulein sister-in-law has been invited, but——"

"In that case——" Frau von Relling rose with dignity. She was not on speaking terms with her sister-in-law: a question of a funeral-wreath. . . . Amid such complications did the society of Dorzheim walk precariously.

Felix gave a murmur which placed his sympathies definitely on the side of Frau von Relling, and at the same time deplored these needless feuds in an otherwise attached family. Then with Richard he took formal leave.

"We are the only Jews in Dorzheim with whom the von Rellings have traffic," he remarked, as they walked home through the little manufacturing town. "But you will count now how many hats are raised to me. The Kochs have ever been deeply respected even among the Christians who bank with us." He beamed with naïve pleasure at each salutation; and looked sharply at Richard to see if the latter were indeed taking note.

Twilight in the streets; and the sky was a dark, thick blue. Crowds of men were already jostling out of the workshops where the cutting, polishing and setting of precious stones formed the principal industry of Dorzheim. Swarthy giants from some legend of forest and charcoal and red-glowing cavern, they did not immediately disperse, but stood about muttering on the pavements, with a scowl for the passer-by who brushed their group too closely. Somewhere a great brazen bell was clanging. It was all rather unreal. . . .

"We shall shortly have trouble with these fellows," remarked the banker to Richard. "Those infernal socialists with their talk——"

Richard was again attacked by a melancholy sense of complete isolation from his surroundings. What was he doing here? He, Marcus, of the Winborough fifth—in this gabled, German burgher town, grotesque to him as an old steel-engraving in a musty folio. Ring of sombre fir-shaggy hills tipped against the sky; ornamental bridges like toys across the river, which ran alongside the one broad street; warm aroma of coffee from the shops, blending with a mournful resinous fragrance that drifted down with the wind from the woods; clusters of people round the small iron tables dotted outside the restaurants; and behind the large open windows of these, dim groups sprawling through a dense smoke-heavy

atmosphere; chatter and bellow and screech; gibberish which was yet disconcertingly comprehensive to Richard. He revolted against his very understanding of their language. They were not his people; Lothar, with his flaxen hair and his botany-box and his repellant morbidity; this trotting little man, counting the hats that were raised—ah, there was another! . . . and another! . . . like clockwork, up went the hand to the brim. . . . Three elongated boys in capes, whistling "Die Wacht am Rhein"—

> "Lieb Vaterland, kannst ruhig sein,
> Still steht und treu—"

No, these were not his people; this was not his land. Richard stiffened himself against any insidious process of adaptation to circumstances. Daisybanks, Lansdowne Terrace, London, England—that was his address, when he was not at Winborough. Good enough for him. Switzerland was all right, of course . . . the hotel was under English management, and one just went about with one's own set, and behaved much as usual, except that there were mountains. His spirit approved of a Continent moulded on sternly British lines.

And then Deb had dragged him into—this!

A question stirred in his mind! Nationality—was it a fact of any importance, then, to make so much difference when put to the test? . . . He shoved the question away again. Why fuss? This sort of misery—for it was misery—would not pursue him further than across the map of Germany. Let him get back to his own folk; he was homesick, that was all. England became above all desirable as a place where you were jolly and ordinary; took things for granted; no need to think;—there was a quality of purposeful concentration about these German people that oppressed Richard uneasily; why were they so absorbed and ponderous over the minutest detail?

Again Herr Koch jerked off his hat. "Did you see who saluted me? No other than Sanitäts-Rath Maximilian Hauffe. He could quite well have pretended not to see me; there was no lamp where he passed us. But I tell you the Kochs are esteemed in Dorzheim. That was his daughter Frieda-Marie along with him."

Richard looked back, interested to catch a glimpse of Lothar's betrothed. She looked back at the same time. . . . A plump rosy face; swing and dangle of two golden plaits.

Outside the door of their house they were joined by Mrs Koch and Deborah. Felix inserted his latchkey and preceded them into the hall.

"Na, was Frau Ladenberg amiable? Did you like her?" he inquired of Deb.

"Not—not very much."

"Not? But she is English; she is your countrywoman."

With infinite pains and pride had this sole Englishwoman in Dorzheim been excavated for the girl's benefit. Deb felt acutely the reproach in his tones. The meeting ought to have been at least as momentous as that of Stanley and Livingstone in the desert. Deb herself, after only three days spent in thickly Teutonic company, had been quite excited at the prospect of drinking coffee with Herr Ladenberg's wife from Manchester. She recognized now how unreasonable she had been to have expected instant affinity merely on the negative grounds that neither she nor Elly Ladenberg happened to be German.

At the same moment, Marianna was enquiring of Richard: "Well, and have you made a great friendship with Lothar von Relling?"

"No," said Richard, who invariably curtailed speech to its utmost brevity.

"No? But you are almost of the same age!"

Richard grunted, and escaped to his room to dress for that meal which, neither dinner, tea, nor supper, mingled the richness and biliousness of all three.

Felix went into the sitting-room and flung himself on the sofa. Deb and his wife followed him in. The girl went straight to the window, and with some difficulty succeeded in opening it; the decent German window protesting loudly, as it had every right to do. She leant out, cooling her hot cheeks. She had behaved disgracefully that afternoon. . . .

Marianna Koch glanced at her. Then at Felix. An elusive meanness flickered from her narrow light-brown eyes; at the corners of her pretty, fretful mouth. She was very unlike the accepted Saxon type of large blonde beauty. There had been a scandalous babble of tongues in Dorzheim when Felix Koch had first brought her back from a brief holiday he had spent in Bingen. Little worldling that she was, she had yet contrived to trap him in manner incongruously reminiscent of a Grimm's fairy-tale. The broad window above the iron-

monger's shop ; the wistful maiden, youngest of three sisters, who daily stationed herself there, hairbrush held in her hand, a light-brown, feathery cloud surrounding her pale face. . . . He was cured of his infatuation now, after two years' subjection, but could still recall it with painful vividness at a thought flung backwards to that window and the magic it had framed for him. Marianna ! . . . but she was common and petty, and snobbish and quarrelsome ; she had married him solely because he was a banker, a fine gentleman. He had a suspicion lately that she would like to be rid of him ; yes, now, when he had barely placated a bitterly offended mother ; when, with his reputation for sobriety and prudence, he had made a fool of himself in sight of all Dorzheim. If it had been Sigismund ! . . . It was a constant smart to the vanity of Felix that Sigismund was still highly eligible, whereas he——

He was not even sure that his wife was not deceiving him.

In which case Sigismund would laugh. And Herr Sanitäts-Rath Hauffe would perhaps omit to raise his hat as punctiliously.

Koch's eyes wandered to Deb, in her bluish lilac crêpe dress ; harem skirt that clung as though in well-cut adoration . . . the nape of her neck showed astoundingly bare ; in Dorzheim it was considered smart to wear something called a jabot, and to prop the chin and ears with a high erection of lace and whalebone ; in Dorzheim the dressmakers were commissioned to destroy line, not create it—as in the case of a harem skirt. She was obviously not quite "good class" this girl ; probably some sort of an artist, though he had gathered her people were wealthy. "These English !"—one could account for everything by that contemptuous phrase. . . . And Deb had immensely gratified him that morning at breakfast by remarking : "One might easily mistake you for an Englishman, Herr Koch !" . . . Yes, he liked the girl ; was quite glad that Marianna had taken a fancy to her recently in Switzerland, and had insisted on bringing her back for a visit. It relieved the tension of their constant bickering ; and it gave him a hearer on whom to impress his status in Dorzheim. Then, too, one acquired importance in the little town, when one had guests from England. Relations from Frankfurt, yes—but guests from England were almost unheard of.

And nobody need know that Marianna had practically run away from him to Montreux. She was anæmic, needed a

holiday ; that sufficed for public explanation. He had recalled her with a promise of a fur coat. He had not yet given her the fur coat.

"I can smell Rindbraten," remarked Felix appreciatively, from the sofa. "Do we have it for evening-eating ? Stuffed ? There was some left over from mid-day, was there not ? I trust, Marianchen, that you made it clear to Emma it was not for her ? "

He was smitten with gloom at the thought of the servant browsing over *his* Rindbraten. His wife reassured him. And she added, with slow emphasis : "I tried on some sable coats at Elly Ladenberg's. Her husband had sent for sample styles from Köln. There was one—four thousand marks. It hung well on me. The Ladenberg has already chosen another with a fox collar. Mine has a brocade lining."

"Yours ? " Felix chaffed her. "Ei, ei, how quickly we go. It is now summer."

"That is the time for a good bargain in fur."

"Four thousand marks is too much."

"Not for the best."

"My mother says——"

"Your mother hates me. She would like to see me wear cotton in a snowstorm. She would die of spite if she saw the Frau Sanitäts-Rath Maximilian Hauffe envying me my beautiful sables."

She paused to see if her last artful thrust at his besetting weakness had at all moved her husband. He thundered, to hide his uneasiness : "I tell you, four thousand marks is too much. You are beggaring me. *You* ! "

The woman's eyes grew larger and brighter. She smiled at Deb, who was trying to slip from the room unperceived. "But where are you going ? Felix, the child is running away because she thinks we are quarrelling."

Felix laughed uproariously at the notion.

"I was going to lie down before supper," Deb explained quickly. "I'm rather tired."

"There is no couch in your room. Here, you had better to rest beside my husband. Make room for her then, clumsy bear ! " She laughed a sharp little trill. "How shocked she is ! Heavens, what have I asked her to do ? Surely with a respectable old married man. . . . Come, Felix, be a little gallant. Our English Miss is afraid of you. Na, she was bold

enough this afternoon, having a fine flirt with Meester von Sittart."

"She thinks you are another jealous Huldah von Sittart, Marianna. Did that old woman make ugly grimaces at you, Fräulein Deb? We must be careful where there are handsome husbands from America. But with old Felix Koch—Come, I will be asleep, that will put you at your ease." He rolled over with his face to the wall, and affected to snore loudly.

Marianna applauded the performance. Her teasing eyes informed Deb that she was a stiff little fool, putting a wholly idiotic construction on what was mere playful friendliness on the part of her host and hostess. So Deb lay down beside Felix. . . . It struck her suddenly that the wife has the supreme advantage over the girl in almost any conjunction of circumstances.

Frau Koch moved to the door. "Sleep well, dear children!" It was uttered in the mock-solemn spirit of a benison. But Deb was aware of malice in the woman's stealthy little smile; more than malice—enmity. To her or to Felix?—She would have sprung upright again, save for the feeling that in lying down she had committed herself . . . to what, she did not know. But she did know very definitely, as the door closed gently behind Marianna, that she had made a mistake, and that it was useless to try and repair it. Deb was to suffer all her life from an illusion that one step backward would not avail her after one step forward had already been taken.

. . . Felix had his back still turned to her. But he had abandoned the farcical pretence of snoring. They could not lie much longer in this absurd silence, back to back, solemn, motionless. . . . Deb began to laugh softly. It was really rather ridiculous, except—except that Marianna's face had frightened her.

Should she jump up now—and run? No, that would give alarming point to the situation. Probably Felix had no intentions——

He turned sharply, pulled her round towards him, kissed her and kissed her. And he was thinking: "If this was what Marianna wanted, then there and there—and there——" The girl did not matter. She was not like a German Mädchen who has been nicely brought up and carefully guarded for matrimony. Her people had let her come here, to complete strangers.

And she wore collarless blouses and had flirted conspicuously with von Sittart.

. . . Her throat—how long and thick and dusky white . . . what a firm column for that three-cornered, weary little face.

Marianna was, he felt sure, just outside the closed door. What was her motive in all this? That when it came to it, when he found her out, she should also have an accusing finger to point?—"Can you wonder, my friends? First he does not give me a fur coat, and then he makes shameless love to the guest under my roof. . . ."

Felix Koch was pale with anger and humiliation. While he had joined his wife in chaffing Deb, he had been inclined to shout aloud: "Who is the man? Who is he? What do you think I am made of, forcing this upon me?—After you have been six weeks in Switzerland away from me—and yesterday you were tired after the journey—too tired! . . . and I—and I. . . . Now, this insult!"

He had controlled himself, curious to see what she would do next. He was not going to control himself any more. Let Marianna, if indeed she stood poised on tiptoe, just outside, her light eyes flickering spitefully, let Marianna realize how little he cared for her rebuffs, last night, and the night before. . . . Fur coats? Wives did not get fur coats unless they earned them better.

Deb did not try to break away from the cramping pressure of his arms. She recognized that she had been to blame; had been—careless, somewhere, she was not quite sure where. But she too had now a dim sense of Marianna's object in inviting her, of Marianna's pinched smile outside the door.

. . . This man was rather handsome, viewed from the close range which usually brings distortion of features. She tried to laugh under his stinging kisses, to pick up the spirit of burlesque where they had dropped it. . . . "Pretty child," he muttered; "pretty neck—no wonder she leaves it always unclothed."

"Herr Koch—you promised—I said I wanted to rest——"

"Felix, then."

"I want to rest, Felix——" She took advantage of a momentary relaxation of his arms, to snuggle down into the cushions, as a baby might; to close her eyes with a semblance of trustful drowsiness . . . her lips were half parted, her breathing regular; one curled-up fist pushed against her cheek. At any moment she might just drop off to sleep. . . .

Would he leave her alone now? Was she safe under this guise of silly, innocent confidence? Any sophisticated recognition of his attempt to start a surreptitious affair with her, would have been fatal.

Felix Koch, like all South Germans, was a sentimentalist. Church spires by moonlight, or a slumbering infant, were unfailing bell-pulls to his softer nature. Gently he touched her hair with his fingers. "Sleep then, pretty child, there is nothing to fear," he murmured, profoundly moved by this self-evidence of the rake's reverence for purity. It was all the easier to assume, since he did not really care for Deb.

Deb thought: "And so one must love a man, to like being kissed by him? . . . Or is it only because he is married that I can't like it?"

She had been in love, of course; not the conventional once and once only, but twice. A glamorous episode with a young Territorial Captain, Con Rothenburg, eldest son of her father's partner. And later on, a man whose age doubled hers: the doctor who had taken over the practice while the Marcus' old family practitioner went round the world for his health. This was a less complete attachment than with Con, for Doctor Steele was not even aware of her tremulous passion; nor with what conscientious honesty she prevented herself from deliberately seeking to contract the ailments which would have ensured his attendance. It had occurred to her, while his hand was on her racing pulse: "How easy it would be for him just to bend down and kiss me. So easy that it doesn't seem fair he shouldn't. So easy—he could forget it at once; and I should always remember. . . ." But Doctor Steele had relinquished his locum tenency, and disappeared, leaving Deb with no such memory.

There had been other—minor adventures. A great many. So irresistibly did she attract them, that one might fancy her reincarnated from some famous harlot of old history. And besides, she involuntarily invited them because she was so plainly on the look-out. Yet she was on the look-out not for minor adventures, but for the big thing; the thing to engross her existence; to dwarf its lesser trickiness; to drench her quick nervous soul with peace; provide employment for her restless, life-bitten brain. If Deb had been an artist, the big thing had been easier to find. She was an artist, but in appreciation only; non-creative. Or if Deb had been religious.

. . . Religion attacked her imagination as little as the winged Victory, rushing like wind down the steps of the Louvre. She knew that the masterpiece was there; she had not seen it herself; others had seen it; she hoped one day to see it. Meanwhile—she could do without it, and not feel the loss.

So, a pilgrim without a staff, she had roamed. . . .

But this special incident ought not to have occurred. Instinct told her there was a certain type of girl to whom it could not have occurred. She had always hoped she was this girl; sheathed in a sort of hard, transparent whiteness from which anything that was not the one big thing would infallibly slide off, without giving the occupant of this convenient armour the slightest trouble.

Of late, however, she had been growing suspicious of her powers to ward off an accumulation of petty experiences.

Experiences ?—but she wanted experience.

She tried to trace back the initial carelessness—yes, carelessness was the only word for it—which had led to her present plight. She ought to have gone to her room to lie down, in spite of Marianna's sneers. Yet that would have seemed a ridiculous affectation of prudery, especially as that very afternoon. . . . Ah, here the fault, then ! . . . But she had not really flirted with Ralph von Sittart; the ladies of Dorzheim had misread that spurt of revolt which had suddenly lit her to flame; revolt from their disapproval of her; revolt from the stiff chairs on which each one stiffly sat, with her stiff neck upheld in whalebone. . . . Rather than make one of them, she had preferred to squat upon the bearskin in front of the tall, white, frozen stove; bend down her unfettered neck to rub her cheek caressingly against the animal's beautiful head—Oh, it had been an exhibition of bad manners, certainly; even cheap bad manners . . . bearskins and tigerskins were a bohemianism which London had long discarded; but these German women could be shocked by nothing more subtle than the effrontery of five seasons ago. And Deb had to shock them, in the impish mood which possessed her, for which Elly Ladenberg (*née* Harrison) was perhaps primarily responsible. "You haven't brought your needle-work ?" "I haven't got any," laughed Deb. "Then you have finished your present for Frau Koch ?" in a discreet undertone. Deb learnt that it was the sacred custom here for any young girl staying with a

married lady, to stitch a most elaborate piece of embroidery as a thank-offering for her hostess.

The information depressed her. She enquired if it would not be possible to obtain the same effect of overpowering gratitude, by sending to an expensive shop in London.

"You can see for yourself that it would not do. The sentiment would not be the same."

"Curse the sentiment," murmured Deb mournfully, disappointed of an ally.

. . . The word was passed round that the English girl was, to say the least of it, eccentric. Anything sensational might be expected of her.

Deb responded flauntingly to their expectations. Impossible anyway to efface herself from the conspicuous position she occupied as "Frau Koch's visitor." Guests were rare in Dorzheim; no jolly, casual happening, but a solemn event which exacted a whole code of ceremonial. And even then the visitors were usually somebody's relations. But all of a sudden a strange girl—from that mad country—even Frau Koch confessing to a minimum of previous acquaintance. . . . "The poor Marianna tells me she had no idea that the father would permit it." "Odd, very odd. Has she money, do you know?" "Oh, surely; her dresses are of the best material, even though they are fashioned in a style. . . . dearest Frau Bergmann—*that skirt*!"

And then Ralph von Sittart had strolled into the party; handsome, middle-aged German-American, who propped up his indolence by an elderly wife's income. And it had been a well-nigh hysterical relief for Deb to hear English spoken. . . . Frau von Sittart's face . . . the whispers . . . and all the knitting-needles clacking. . . .

She had behaved outrageously. But only under the goad of alert protest to her entire personality, to her slightest act. She was in a false position from the start. She should not have come. She had only come because of John Thorpe's mother and the ear-trumpet. . . .

III

At this stage of her attempts to track consequences to their motive lair, Deb became aware that her feet were being plagued by pins and needles, and that she most desperately desired to

wriggle. She judged that it would be safe now to awake from slumber . . . it must be a full half-hour that she and Felix Koch were lying motionless side by side. She opened her eyes, raised herself on one elbow, sighed deeply, as one who yields up a pleasant dreamland. Then only did she perceive that all this pantomime was unnecessary; her companion was quite peacefully asleep.

Deb slithered off the couch, tip-toed to the door, closed it soundlessly behind her. No one was in the hall. She ran upstairs, and knocked at the door of her brother's room.

Richard, in his shirt-sleeves, was standing in front of the looking-glass; and with a brush ferociously brandished in either hand, was frustrating his hair's racial inclination to curl.

"Are you dressing for supper? The others don't, you know."

"No reason for me to be a barbarian, if they are, is it?"

"When in Rome——"

"Do as the Romans *don't*—if they're Germans!"

"Richard—we had awful trouble at home sometimes to get you to dress in the evenings."

He grinned. "Had you? I shouldn't be surprised if you had it again." After a pause, he enquired: "How long d'you want to stop here, Deb?"

"In Dorzheim? Don't you like it?"

He considered a moment. "No."

"Why not?"

"Lots of reasons. Can't be bothered to think 'em all out."

"We ought to stay a fortnight, now they've invited us, and we've come."

"All right."

Deb sat down on the bed. Immediately the great inflated pillow that acted as eiderdown almost submerged her in its rising billows. She struck them down passionately—

"Richard."

"Um?"

"Don't leave me alone with Felix Koch, if you can manage it. . . ."

She was prepared for a brotherly outburst: "D'you mean to say the fellow dared——" But Richard laid down his brushes, and took up his collar, with a total absence of all emotion. "Oh, all right."

CHAPTER II

I

A FEW days later, Felix Koch came back at an unwonted hour, between dinner and supper, and beckoned his wife to a private conference. Her luminous eyes, as she went, testified to a hope that the mystery enveloped a fur cloak.

Presently Richard was summoned.

"Row about Lothar von Relling," he explained nonchalantly to Deb afterwards.

"Lothar?"

"Gloomy little beggar with the astonished hair who came here once to tea. *You* ought to know, Deb. The whole shindy concerns you. What have you been up to?"

She reflected a moment before confession. Prudence prompted the query: "What do they say I've been up to?"

Richard chuckled—then became instantly solemn. "This morning, Herr Sanitäts-Rath Oberunterammergau von und zu hellofarau Maximilian Hauffe called upon the honest and respected banker, Felix Koch, to complain that his daughter Frieda-Marie had been slighted and insulted by said daughter's plighted husband-to-be, Lothar von Relling, who was seen two evenings ago in the darkest portion of the Grünewald—need I go on?"

"N-no," said Deb, "you needn't go on with that part of it. Tell me what the Kochs are saying?"

Richard dropped into a creditable imitation of Felix Koch: "So I say with dignity to Herr Hauffe: 'Herr Hauffe, tell me only this: is your anger at what has occurred, is it because my guest is a Jewess? because I myself am a Jew? If so, I regret, but I will not move in the matter.' And he replied, taking off his hat: 'Herr Koch, let me now assure you that there is no one in this town for whom I have a respect more profound than for yourself; I am a broad-minded man, and had your guest been a Christian lady, which she is not, I should have still been obliged my present course in defence of my

daughter's honour to pursue.' At this I started up, and put on my hat, and gave him my hand in friendship, and together we went to Frau von Relling. Ei, but Dorzheim stared to see us arm-in-arm; twenty-seven Catholics alone took off their hats to us——"

"Is there lots more about hats, Richard?"

"No, the rest is mostly about Lothar and you. The whole town is simply ramping. You're a goose, Deb. 'Tisn't worth it. Why, he's only six months older than I am—and a German!"

"Do you suppose *I* got any fun out of it?" she flared.

But it was niggardly to grudge something that lay within her power to give. Or wasn't it? . . . Chastity—the girl in white armour. . . . To give so easily, though—she remembered Doctor Steele. And the gloomy little boy had thirsted for that one kiss; too inarticulate to ask for it; too comic, in his owl's spectacles and low collar and vertical crest of hair, to make a silently romantic plea, he just sat on the pile of logs looking up at her in dazed sickly reverie, as she came towards him along the misty blue road that meandered among the fir trees behind the town. She understood that by lightly dropping her lips on to his, there, in that scene, at that hour, she could give him an exquisite moment to carry through the sentimental years into manhood. Why not, then? The girl who withholds such chance gifts in her power, for the sake of what was called her bloom, what was she, after all, but a miser?

Deb's kiss was just an impulse of almsgiving. She did not shatter the boy's ecstasy by speech. Hardly pausing in her walk, she bent . . . he had a vision of her serious mouth and warmly glowing eyes . . . and she went swiftly on.

Frau Huldah von Sittart, who witnessed the idyll and reported on it, could not have been expected to interpret its psychology correctly. But to Richard, Deb tried to explain. . . . It was intolerable that he should suppose she enjoyed kissing scrubby little schoolboys.

He listened, brows knitted severely: "But, my dear kid, that sort of philanthropy is rather dangerous, isn't it, where men in general are concerned?"

"It's just whether one is to be generous or stingy—oh, don't you see? . . . to give what matters so little to me, and so tremendously much to them——"

"Make a habit of it, you'll end by giving what means so much to you and so precious little to them."

Richard's wisdom was a mere accident of repartee; and Deb did not smile; she very rarely smiled; but her voice at all times held a certain clear joyousness that was in startling contrast to her tired little face; her voice was a child, years younger than her lips or her eyes. So that Richard could only dimly suspect her of hidden laughter as she said: "I esteem your judgment, but—you're rather precocious, aren't you?"

"Good Lord, no!" he shouted, appalled. "I'm sensible. You can't walk about dropping kisses."

"Dropping magic," she corrected him gravely. "And if I'm not the poorer, and am quite sure they will be the richer. . . ." She tilted her head defiantly: "Richard, I'd rather be royal than—good!"

Richard pondered a moment over this. His sister watched him with eyes that were half sorrowful, half impudent. Most people would have been astonished that she could confide such feminine subtleties in a brother eight years her junior. But she had never yet been disappointed by a rebuff from Richard that was sheer scoffing schoolboy and no more. He possessed certain qualities she lacked, of uncompromising fairness and sanity. Also, he was shock-proof; an imperturbable Mahomet to whom all mountains came, and were received in a take-it-for-granted spirit.

Sometimes Deb wondered just where, in all this mass of solidity, lay buried that mysterious streak of understanding —kinship, perhaps—on which she relied.

Now he said: "Well, I wouldn't practise your theory of magic-dropping in Dorzheim, if I were you. 'Tisn't the right place for it. Too many Germans about. Germans take things seriously."

Richard was right. Dorzheim did take this act of Deb's with great and exceeding seriousness. They had primarily consulted Richard, and begged him to reprimand his sister, in the Teuton spirit that the male, in all emergencies, takes precedence.

The pastor and the schoolmaster and Frau von Relling and Herr Sanitäts-Rath Hauffe and Huldah van Sittart and Felix Koch paid one another a succession of formal calls. Then suddenly Frau von Relling called no more upon the Kochs . . . and small wonder, since Frieda-Marie Hauffe had been promised an exceptionally large dowry, and it was sheer

madness for Lothar to have imperilled this. True, Wanda von Relling still came to Marianna's At Home day; but this was merely an act of defiance towards old Frau Koch (not on speaking terms with Marianna) who had condoled with Frau von Relling (not on speaking terms with Wanda) on her affliction for which the younger Koch household was responsible. And anyhow, all Dorzheim knew that Wanda had tried to get Sigismund Koch and had failed; so naturally and out of spite, she would choose to continue visiting at the house of Felix (not on speaking terms with Sigismund). . . . But all this led back to ancient history; and Dorzheim, flushed and garrulous, was not to be diverted from the delicious new scandal of the daughter of Herr Sanitäts-Rath Hauffe insulted through the medium of the English girl staying with the Felix Kochs. Well, and had she not flirted with Ralph van Sittart as well? Half Dorzheim had seen her do it. The other half of Dorzheim had noticed her drinking coffee with Sigismund Koch; yes, actually setting her cap at him, the buck of the town, the famous rake—Ach! and did Felix know? . . . "And what was she doing walking alone in the woods at that hour of evening?" demanded Frau Huldah with relish: "Do modest maidens walk without escort? Though to be sure I have heard her say she is already twenty-three; doubtless she is in fear she will be left sitting." "And Lothar von Relling is a Protestant; has been confirmed only half a year ago, with my Karl; that comes of it, then, when one permits oneself to be intimate with a Jewish family; I could have told Frau von Relling. . . ."

The scandal threatened to broaden into religious controversy.

And Frieda-Marie, poor wormling, was, ach, inconsolable! Hitherto in Dorzheim a betrothal was sacred. Others of our sons may follow Lothar von Relling's example of insubordination. To prevent which calamity, Lothar was first expelled from the Gymnasium; then locked into his bedroom; visited alternately by the pastor and the schoolmaster; finally, banished to an aunt and uncle in Dresden. Lothar went, darkly uplifted in his martyrdom; thrilling to a certain deathless memory; but wishing, nevertheless, that before going he might have had a word or two with Frieda-Marie, of whom he was very fond, and who was after all his betrothed. . . .

Still without a smile, Dorzheim settled down to see what Deb would do.

Deb did quite a lot. She was heady with her first draught of conspicuous unpopularity. Vivid and defiant and a little frightened too. Never before had she found herself so the centre of animated disapproval. And as none of those who disapproved were of the people who mattered to her, she was not hurt, nor cast down, but merely possessed by the mischievous wish to do her worst on the propriety of Dorzheim; to avenge their harsh dealings with inoffensive little Lothar von Relling; to yield them more and more material for spiteful gossip. In brief, to earn their condemnation—these folk, who would not, could not, laugh.

She had plenty of social opportunity for exploiting her histrionic demon. For whatever Dorzheim's private opinion of Deb, etiquette decreed that Frau Koch's guest should be shown "attention," should be fêted and entertained. Dorzheim did its duty by Deb, and so considered itself free to censure her. She was invited to attend numerous afternoon coffee-parties, and one big dinner-party at which lawyers and doctors and their wives formed the majority, and Felix Koch was the only banker, as he gleefully informed Deb. She learnt then for the first time the exact ladder of snobbery, of which the apex is the nobility; thence on a descending scale to the military—the professionals—bankers—merchants—clergy and schoolmasters—everybody heedful of their head among the feet on the rung above; everybody ignoring the humbler position of their own feet. Jews had their own parallel ladder of snobbery; and actors and artists were not properly considered on any ladder at all.

The great event of her stay was a Masonic entertainment, where she was conspicuous in her dead-black crêpe-de-chine evening-dress. "An unmarried girl in black—Gott in Himmel! And brunette too; had she been a blonde, one might have forgiven her, though even then——" Most of the other ladies wore afternoon toilet; and a few were in tartan blouses with the neck ripped out, and dark skirts. At this party Deb made the acquaintance of the owner of the largest jewel factory in Dorzheim; who the next day formally conducted her over the premises; into the cavernous underground workshops; dimness speckled by small shaded red lights; at each separate table a man in tinted blinkers intent on a heap of precious stones that he would sift carelessly through his huge hairy fingers, before selecting one for his mysterious tools. None

of these men looked up as their employer and his party passed among them. Deb felt the sunless air choked up with hatred and menace; the whirring of the thousand little machines oppressed her; it was an evil place—and she remembered Koch's allusion to the Socialist influence and possible trouble. . . .

Home-life did not exist for the Kochs; every evening, when no set form of entertainment was offered, Felix and Marianna, Deb and Richard, sat in the big restaurant in Lindenstrasse; sat there for two or three hours, drinking coffee or syrups, eating sweet cloying cakes; while the men roared their politics or slammed the domino-cubes on the table, and slowly obliterated their womenfolk in clouds of foul smoke. The group about the Kochs was always a large one, and included the younger brothers who had been hastily sent for from neighbouring towns on rumour of Deb's enormous dowry. Deb was herself responsible for this rumour. It was one of her first acts of devilry. Actually it procured her three proposals . . . her excited fancy multiplied these to a grotesque figure out of all proportion to the truth. The trio of smug-correct young men, overwhelming her with staccato bows and wired nosegays and compliments which an intelligent child of ten might have disdained, made their offers of marriage almost simultaneously, and were all three accepted, with meek surprise that they should care for a *portionless* damsel . . . at which they melted to the limpness of three candles left in a strong sun, and melted out of Deb's sight, and melted away from Dorzheim. And two of them, because they had begun to love her, kept silence as to the reason for their withdrawal. But Ludo Salzmann wrote vindictively to the sister-in-law who had summoned him. And Deb, compelled in self-respect to commit one villainy the more, accepted Sigismund Koch's invitation to drink tea with him in his rooms . . . "English fashion—yes, I have dwelt some time in England."

He had been accidentally introduced to her at the Lodge entertainment. And afterwards Felix remarked wrathfully, and hardly in the spirit of Masonic or natural brotherhood: "You are not to speak to that fine fellow. You understand? Not with my consent. Hundert-tausendteufel!—and what did you think of him?"

"He's very handsome," demurely.

"Ach, he is a scoundrel! And do you know what they call him in the town, with his brown curly beard and pale face?

They call him Jesus Christus. That's a joke, you see." Felix laughed uproariously, and Richard asked: "Why is it a joke, sir?" "But can't you see? He, my brother, is a *Jew* . . . and they call him Jesus Christus!" "But Jesus Christ *was* a Jew," argued Richard stolidly. Koch stared at him. The English had no sense of humour. He turned the conversation from wit to politics: "What in your opinion are the present aims of Mister Usskeess?" But Richard was unable to fit the name to any English statesman of his knowledge, so did not take up the challenge.

With all his reputation of a fascinating rake, Sigismund behaved at his tea-party with exemplary decorum. Moreover, he had invited his mother to be present. Deb liked him better than any one she had met since her arrival in Germany.

"What are you doing in Dorzheim, for goodness' sake, child?" This query he put when he was escorting her home.

Deb laughed. "I wish I knew. I ran away from a scrape——"

"To find yourself in worse scrapes here?"

"You've . . . heard something about me?"

His eyes twinkled. "Tongues wag in Dorzheim."

"May—may I come to you about it . . . if things get bad?" For in spite of bravado, she was becoming apprehensive of the sly malice ever more apparent in Marianna's conversation; of the enmity piling up against her; and of a vague, more impersonal enmity which, strangely, seemed to loom behind.

"Heaven protect me—and you too!" exclaimed Sigismund in mock horror. "And you suppose Dorzheim would regard me, me of all people, as a suitable confessor for your sins?"

It was evident that Sigismund prided himself on his reputation as a "dangerous man."

"Where have you been this afternoon?" demanded Felix.

"To your brother's flat. It's—it's—a very pretty flat, isn't it?"

The banker grew livid. "I tell you, Fräulein Deb, he is trying to marry you for your money."

"He did not try anything of the sort!" indignantly. "And I have no money. And your Frau Mama was there."

"That was an arranged insult to me," Marianna declared.

Marianna was enraged because her well-planned intentions with regard to her husband and Deb had miscarried. Yet more enraged, because they had not quite miscarried. More-

over, Sigismund happened to be the unknown rival whom Felix suspected in the background. If this does not accord with his care in providing an adequate chaperone for the little English rebel who so indiscreetly accepted an invitation to his rooms, let it be remembered that there is no element with whom the true rake deals more circumspectly than with girlhood . . . until he reaches the age when chastity becomes desirable instead of formidable.

Marianna was further enraged because Felix had said he could not afford visitors *and* fur cloaks. The von Rellings had ceased to call. And now Deb was drinking tea with her mother-in-law—and not even bothering to lie about it.

And yet, when Richard proposed abruptly, at supper, that they ought to be thinking of departure, both his host and hostess were unable to stem themselves in mechanical utterance of their habitual code of protest and renewed hospitality : " But certainly you must not dream of leaving us yet—we shall not allow it—you have been with us so little time—it is such a pleasure. No, no, indeed you must not go. . . ."

II

The next day, most of the workmen in the factories went on strike. Those who refused were attacked as blacklegs. The quaint, sunshiny streets were hideous with brawling. And Deb could no longer with safety be allowed to take her solitary walks, which were the only relief from the strain of Marianna's perpetual smiling hatred.

By degrees, her feverish mood of excitement evaporated entirely. She began to dread stumbling over the traces of her own joyous misdemeanour. Was there no careless youth in this tight, compressed little city of envious wranglings and complicated feuds and bitter snobbery ? It struck her with a shock that Dorzheim seemed to contain no element between subdued childhood and ambitious or self-satisfied matrimony.

Something ominous was afoot ; she was no longer the centre of interest ; men came and went on short journeys ; men held whispered conferences, excluding their womenfolk. Deb felt ever more urgently the need for departure. But she was waiting for a letter from her family to say when they intended leaving Switzerland ; and if she and Richard were to rejoin

them at Montreux, or at home in England. The letter was delayed; morning after morning she expected it, and it did not come. It ought to have contained money for the journey. . . .

Dorzheim was no longer a funny little German town, inhabited mainly by caricatures. It was a place of horror. . . . She was wakeful at nights; and musing at her window, she saw, or thought she saw, long phantom trains glide without shriek or rumble over the railway-lines some half-mile distant. Black shapes of trains, no single window lit . . . all night they were creeping past in the darkness . . . and the next night . . . and the next . . . every time she rose from her bed to look again. . . .

III

"Deb, you know Austria declared war on Servia the other day?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Seen the papers lately?"

"German papers!" scornfully; good enough for Germans, of course, but——

"Russia has joined Servia, and Germany has declared war on Russia, and—we're *in* Germany. They say that France will have to join up with Russia, and perhaps England with France. Then there's Holland and Belgium . . . doubtful if they can keep out. . . ."

With a sound like the rush of bursting waters, Deb's nightmare ceased to be her private affair. . . . Bursting waters . . . yes, a piece of music—Ravel, was it? She had heard it before she left London—the Sorcerer's ignorant apprentice left alone with the magic broom . . . trickle of water that he summoned up . . . torrents of water . . . multiplying devouring water . . . it swamped the room and the corners of the room and the street outside and the world beyond . . . gleeful swirls of water, unrelenting, irresistible, that pursued and flooded every inch of dry . . . every inch of dry . . . the music roared deafeningly in her head, drowning coherent thought. . . . Somebody had touched the broom. . . .

She told Richard about the fantastic procession of trains.

"Troops, of course. Being hurried to the frontier. They

must have quenched all the lights. Didn't want us to know they were prepared."

"Us? You and me?"

"England, you ass!" Richard grinned at the idea of a nation plunged in darkness for the benefit of himself and Deb. Deb —umph! he hunched his shoulders, and stared at her moodily. He was responsible for Deb's safety.

"You wouldn't care to marry somebody here and settle down, I suppose? It might come cheaper than hauling you along to England. It would be sport getting through if I were alone. . . ."

"I'm sorry. No, I'd rather not settle in Dorzheim for good. But we could go home by two separate routes."

"Job enough to find one route, I should say. Stop ragging, Deb; this isn't a joke."

"I'm sorry," she murmured again, all womanhood abject before the gruff commonsense of all manhood.

"That idiot Koch ought to have warned us. He must have known something. We should have left here a week ago, when I suggested it. . . . If it's going to be a general flare-up, then one jolly well wants to be in one's own country, and not in somebody else's!"

CHAPTER III

I

PATRIOTISM, even more than bunting-deep, is largely a matter of habit. Before August, nineteen-fourteen, Richard had rather taken his country for granted. Now he awoke to an England that in return for years of security and a lazy pleasure at the sight of so many red patches on the school-map, suddenly exacted service—fighting service. Richard cursed his age; welcomed any indication in the trend of things "out there" that seemed to prophesy a minimum of three years' activities. "If only the war holds out till I can get to it!" He suffered from disturbing premonitions of a peace signed and ratified just one day before his eighteenth birthday.

War, as a pastime, a profession, an emotional outlet, fulfilled every unspoken need of his temperament. He was a born pugilist; he did not mind bodily discomfort; he was endowed with splendid physique; he kept cool in emergencies; he had an infinite preference for male society; he was under a firm impression that he was devoid of that cumbersome burden called imagination; he lacked graceful accomplishments. What did the future hold for a boy of such capacities and disqualifications? Nineteen-fourteen came like an answer to an obstinate riddle.

And—confound it!—he was not yet sixteen.

Winborough had its Cadet Corps, which was a slight compensation for the utter meaningless absurdity of Latin and Greek—dead studies in a time of live history. At least, one was preparing for a later share in the conflict. The ethics of war and peace did not bother him. War suited him, as a definite opportunity for concerted action; whereas peace appeared a condition infinitely more difficult, more scattered and involved and hesitant. Richard approved of the indubitable simplicity of a nation at war: every mind thinking alike; every effort directed towards the same end; loyalty accepted as a predominant emotion, without need to fuss over

lesser problems of one's personal age. He was animated as yet by no special rancour towards the Germans. . . . Poor old Grandfather was a German ; rotten for him, these days ! Pater was naturalized, so he was all right (the yellow press was not circulated at Winborough). . . . The natural conditions of war demanded an enemy, and the Germans would do as well as anyone else ; better, in fact ; for they were powerful and well-prepared, so that there was an excellent chance that hostilities would last till Richard was eighteen——

He always came back to that.

The Dunnes were both in the navy ; Greville, just about to join the Grand Fleet on H.M.S. "Canada" ; young Frank, still at Osborne. Richard spent this Christmas of Greville's final leave at Mrs Dunne's jolly, crowded cottage in Essex, on the outskirts of a little country town that was just about the same size as Dorzheim. . . . He amused the Dunnes exceedingly by his accounts of that place, and of his headlong scramble home with Deb. It was something of an exploit to have been caught in enemy territory on the eve of war : "If we had started for home two days later, we shouldn't have started at all ; they'd have kept us there for weeks, probably, and then goose-stepped us over the frontier under strict official supervision."

"Deb, not you," Greville corrected. "I knew a chap of our age who was at Dresden at the time, and they've interned him over there."

"Lord, not really ! That would have been a swizzle, missing all the fun, tucked away with a lot of rotten Germans——"

"They'd be English, you ass, in a German internment camp."

"M'yes, so they would. Still, one would be horribly out of it all ; not that Winborough's much better"—reverting to the old grievance—"I wish I'd plumped for the navy when you did."

Mrs Dunne smiled rather wistfully. "I wonder if your father shares that wish of yours, Richard."

"Dunno. Shan't see him till Easter, I expect. I was glad to be away these hols. out of all the fuss of moving. We've let our house, you know."

"You must have cheered when you got your hoof in England again," Greville remarked, reverting to the journey from Dorzheim.

But instead of the "You bet!" one might have expected, Richard was silent. . . . He was still shy of remembering the rush of sentiment which had attacked him on arrival at Folkestone that second of August, after three chaotic days and nights through a continent that was screaming mad with war. . . . God bless these stolid English porters—these English engines that knew reliably whither they were bearing the train—this decent Sunday evening quiet everywhere. . . . Richard dug his hands in his pockets and snapped his lips firmly as he strode up the gangway of the boat; he was neither lunatic nor poet, to shout aloud the pæan: "England, my England!" that was tightening his throat and thrumming in his heart . . . but he had vowed, nevertheless, as he stepped on shore, that he would prove to the utmost stretch of his powers a good citizen, a loyal patriot. He was definitely grateful to his country at this moment for its mere existence.

The emotion had died to a vague shame at having made an exhibition of himself, even with himself as the only witness. Yet now, as he bent forward to turn the chestnuts roasting over the fire, and tossed a burnt one on to the lap of Molly Dunne, Greville's flapper cousin, he experienced the kind of satisfaction with his surroundings which can best be translated into a heartfelt grunt. They were the conventionally right sort of people: Mrs Dunne, frail and pleasant; the two boys in their blue and gold uniforms; Molly, tanned brown as her own tangle of hair—an ugly kid, but good sport. A rough little terrier lay on the hearthrug; everybody's skates, caked from recent use, sprawled all over the shabby chintz furniture; and the big holly-twined portrait of the late Commander Dunne domineered the room from above the mantelpiece. Jolly things strewn about, too; the model of a Chinese junk; bits of queer distorted coral and stone and shell; fantastic weapons slung on the walls; photographs of battleships and their crews—all these evidences of a sailor family, and far lands, without in the least influencing the typically English atmosphere of the room. If the Dunnes had settled in Japan or Bulawayo, their apartments would still have been as—Dunne-ish. These curios—they were just curios, neither more nor less; and as such, were given their proper place.

Queer, reflected Richard, that before the spasm of homesick misery which had thrust at him on a certain evening in the streets of Dorzheim, he had never been consciously aware,

as at present, of a state of well-being. He supposed the contrast had for good or for evil awakened him ; and questioned glumly whether it were altogether convenient to be at the mercy of perceptions as sharpened and sensitive.

If this were Dorzheim, then the chestnuts would be gingerbread ; Greville and Molly would be " betrothed " by arrangement of their elders ; and Richard would be proudly noting the fact that he was the one Jew with whom the Dunnes had " traffic. . . ."

Thank goodness, in England you could be a Jew, and hardly even know it. . . .

II

Jews . . . but the Marcus children were yearly allowed to hunt for hidden Easter eggs in their garden. Dorothea, Ferdinand's wife, had been the mildest of Protestants, as he was the most tolerant of Israelites ; and there were times when bacon and matsas had appeared simultaneously upon their table, not from any unadjusted clash of orthodoxy, but merely that Ferdinand insisted on the British national breakfast, and Dorothea had an eccentric liking for unleavened bread when it was " in season." Richard and Deb never learnt any Hebrew, till the approach of the boy's " Barmitzfa " rendered necessary in his case a certain knowledge of the language, easily forgotten. The occasion itself struck him as mainly remarkable for the amount of presents he received. Deb considered it distinctly unfair that boys should be able to put in such a profitable extra birthday ; she tried to get quits in hard value, by accepting as often as offered the post of bridesmaid, whether in church or in synagogue. Both religious ceremonies made an equally profound impression upon her—for an hour. The Marcuses did not keep up the Jewish feast-days and holidays, and consequently the younger generation were rather hazy as to their origin and significance. Ferdinand made a half-hearted effort to keep them reminded of the most important of these, so that they should not give offence to such of their friends and relatives as were strict in observance, by a blank stare of ignorance on receiving salutation : " Muzzeltoff ! " They wished each other a Happy New Year quite impartially in the autumn and on the first of

January ; and Christmas was a jovial mingling of whatever customs were pleasantest of diverse creeds and countries.

Dorothea and Ferdinand had agreed that whatever children might be born to them, should make their own choice of religion, or no religion, when they were old enough. Themselves had endured much from despotic parents, and were eagerly and insistently broad-minded in their educational intentions.

Old Hermann Marcus had sent his son to England on business when the lad was barely twenty—a shy, plump, sweet-faced little fellow, with bright brown eyes round with admiration for England and England's ways. Peremptorily recalled to Bavaria after two years of Paradise, he summoned all his courage, and—from a safe distance—defied the tyrant . . . somewhat tempering the grand effect of his rebellion by a diplomatic postscript pointing out that in London he could be of more service to the firm than in Munich ; was rapidly gathering custom ; and hoped in a few years to be able to marry. His father replied tersely that he was a thickhead, had always been a thickhead, would always be a thickhead, and was therefore admirably adapted by nature to settle down in a nation of thickheads—"but in that case, you will at once sever connection with my business." Ferdinand dutifully trotted back to Germany ; spent several wretched months in vain longings for his adopted country ; and finally, not being of that stuff of which heroes are made, sneaked back to his Hampstead boarding-house, his tennis, his Sunday river-parties, and mysterious November fogs, leaving his sister Stella to break the news to old Marcus. The latter promptly cut his son out of his will. Ferdinand perseveringly worked himself up to a sufficiently good position on the Stock Exchange to be able, at the age of twenty-seven, to rescue Dorothea Ladislov from an uncongenial home, and marry her romantically at the registrar's. The pretty, black-haired girl was the daughter of an aristocratic Czech family, which had settled in England before she was born. She and Ferdinand had fallen in love over their compared experiences of early years heavy and burdensome with must-nots. Deb, directly she appeared on the scene, flitted like a will-o'-the-wisp through dream-acres of sunshiny freedom planned for her by her parents, entirely from contrast with their own rigidly enclosed childhood. Not all the present bliss in the world could quite compensate for

those best lost years. Deb should live carelessly radiant from the very beginning—"Not spoilt, Ferdie; that's different and hateful. She must learn reasonable manners and control; obedience even. Only there needn't be so very much to obey. And as soon as she can think for herself——"

"She shall dance to her own melodies. Ja, ja, it will be pleasant to have a happy little daughter, not checked, not afraid. And we must learn not to be shocked at her, as we grow older. She shall know that we trust her. Indeed, yes, it will be all right. When one is happy, one is also good. Our parents never understood that."

"It will be all right," echoed Dorothea, her dark eyes tender and luminous. "And we won't grumble, or ask questions, will we? Papa was always grumbling, and Mama asked so many questions. . . . Ferdie, it would be terrible if we should forget, and wake up one morning to find we were only ordinary parents."

She gave a little gasp of horror. Her husband took her face between his hands and kissed it. . . .

They made quite a pretty hobby out of extraordinary parenthood.

Then, as if to remind them that the other species still existed, when Deb was a wilful little creature of seven, came an imperious summons from Ferdinand's father, who most inopportunely had decided to forgive them. The old thraldom held; they had no option but meekly to submit to forgiveness. This necessitated a journey to Bavaria—a long stay in Munich. Stella was so glad of them, so glad of this young, laughing sister-in-law in the house. But Marcus defied all tradition of stern grandfathers by refusing to succumb instantly to the pretty fearless ways of his first grandchild; in fact, he disapproved so completely of Deb, her looks, her English education, her unrebuked chatter, her clothes, her nurse, her loose shower of black hair, of everything that was Deb's, that she was kept as much as possible out of his way. Sweet-natured and subservient in all else, Ferdinand was implacable on the one point: the old autocrat should not interfere with the happiness of one more girl-child. Already he had doomed Stella to spinsterhood; he forbade young men inside the house, and forbade Stella outside the house. One conventional marriage arrangement he had made for her with the parents of a sufficiently wealthy suitor, who, however, turned from Stella

to a larger dowry. No father could be expected to do more in the way of duty. An arrangement which Stella had the temerity to make for herself, he countered by the simple Teutonic method of locking her up, and shouting at her till she was tired. . . .

For Ferdinand, he had gained a slight respect. The boy had at least managed to win some sort of commercial foothold. "What do you reckon to make per annum, wass?" "About six hundred to a thousand." Marcus was distinctly impressed: "Ach! as little as that?" Ferdinand enquired after the old firm. "The profits are excellent, sir; increasing yearly. Bah, did you think we should go to pieces because you left us?" sarcastically.

The arrogant old merchant was lying. At Dorothea's death he was thankful for an excuse to let Stella go to England and take over the charge of her brother's household; thankful for an excuse to cut down expenses . . . the business was rapidly running downhill. He warded off bankruptcy for another eleven years—then came the irrevocable crash. Ferdinand, who could not rid himself of the filial habit, immediately wrote and offered his father a home with them. So Hermann Marcus, at the age of seventy-seven, came to England, to "Daisybanks," in Lansdowne Terrace. He found himself instantly relegated to a very comfortable back-seat among his children and grandchildren. Ferdie, though still timid in actual converse with his father, yet proved stubbornly master in his own house; and Stella had developed a brisk liveliness which was a true source of grief to her father. The two now treated his attempts to bully them, with a semi-humorous tolerance which the puzzled despot could only ascribe to his loss of income—"Of course, if I were swollen with money,"—with grim common-sense he resigned himself to dependence and rheumatism; it comforted him to suppose his loss of authority was due to material and not to moral causes.

As for the third generation, he continued to disapprove of Deb, but liked Richard infinitely better. "You've no eyes for anyone but the girl," he would growl at Ferdinand. "To my two children I dispensed equal affection." Ferdinand smiled. . . . When he smiled he more than ever resembled a cheerful little troll, his small ripe face a web of intersecting spidery wrinkles. It was true that Deb was his darling who

could do no wrong; it was for Deb that he and Dorothea had built up so many defiant immature plans—beautiful plans. Dorothea had died for Richard's life . . . she would have loved the boy best, if she had lived; Ferdie guessed it, and conscientiously tried to supply a double quantity of favouritism. But Richard was undemonstrative; had started the schoolboy attitude even while his nurse was hopefully striving against odds to turn him into a pretty dear, a Fauntleroy. At three years old, his voice was gruff, his knees scraped, his manner properly off-hand, his tastes independent; he called ladies and gentlemen by their surnames, without prefix, when they bent to caress "dear little Dickie." It was disconcerting to Ferdie's kindly-disposed partners, misled by the white suit and deep lace collar, to find heavy brows bent upon them, while they were boomingly hailed as "Nash" and "Rothenburg." Aunt Stella, wisely accepting the inevitable, bought her nephew a couple of rough navy-blue jerseys, a pair of sturdy boots, and a Newmarket overcoat; Nurse lamented that this latter article was not in white bunny-fur—"Master Dickie looks such a darling in white." "He looks something between a burglar and a prize-fighter in anything; for the future, Nurse, he had better be known only as Richard." "Oh, Madam, he's but a baby yet!" Richard overheard, and: "I'm but a baby yet," he pleaded with dignity the next time his father attempted to administer mild but well-deserved chastisement. From sheer astonishment, Ferdie let him off.

And after that, he seemed to be always at school, or "knocking round with other chaps." He fell into frequent scrapes, and usually managed to fall out of them again without extraneous assistance. He stolidly kept a place in class a little above half-way, without spurts or lapses. His philosophy was eminently suited to practical needs; he kept his ugliness well brushed and tubbed and free from eccentricity, and his slow white grin had a bewildering fascination.

"Our young Richard, my dear," commented Aunt Stella to Deb, "reminds me of the best quality of almond rock; you take it home, and prepare for a treat, and then you find the sweetshop girl has forgotten to break it up for you." She spoke English perfectly, but with foreign vivacity and a strong foreign accent. "Richard has never been broken up; he is unwieldy; he cannot be put in the mouth."

" But he *is* of the best quality," Deb quickly defended him ; and was silent for a moment, thinking about Richard. She adored the boy ; was content to know that she came first with him, though he rarely saw her, and still more rarely spoke to her except in the ordinary way of younger-brother teasing.

" Aunt Stella, Richard isn't so stodgy as he likes to think he is," she said suddenly. " Do you know, twice I've seen him nearly hysterical."

" My child, you're dreaming."

" I'm not. Once was because a wasp was circling over his plate, and wouldn't go away. And the other time was over a book."

" Dear me, what book ? "

But Deb was sorry now she had spoken so impulsively. Stella Marcus had a disconcerting way of making every subject seem as a hollow ball with a tinkle inside, to be lightly tossed, twice, thrice, and then let fall . . . to roll away.

" What book ? "

" ' A Tale of Two Cities.' "

" Oh, every little boy cries over that."

Deb had lied. It was not " The Tale of Two Cities," but an account of the Dreyfus case.

This first war Christmas of nineteen-fourteen, the Marcuses moved out of their house in Lansdowne Terrace. The Stock Exchange was one of the definite places where a man of German extraction could be made to feel uncomfortable ; very uncomfortable. Ferdinand Marcus did not complain of the cold-shouldering he received. " It's natural, Stella ; every time I open my mouth they are bound to be reminded." But then some arbitrary stockbroker accused him publicly of being a spy and a traitor . . . and Marcus quickly resigned his partnership in the firm of Nash, Rothenburg and Marcus ; and withdrew to live as best he might on his income. The little man was hurt and sorrowful ; he loved England passionately—he had renounced Germany and chosen England from motives of pure love. Not all the sons of Germany are as violently attached to the Fatherland as the Fatherland would like to make out. Some among them have resented the prison-wall system, the prevalent aggressive despotism that crushes out their human ways and wishes. So they had come to England, and had found a difference, and had stayed. . . .

" Especially we Jews find the difference," Ferdinand explained

to his sister, when he told her what had occurred on the Exchange. "They don't realize, over here, how the Jews are still treated in Germany. And so they won't believe that our loyalty to a country adopted is not hypocrisy, and that we can be truly glad if England wins the war. Stella, I wish they would believe it; I wish they would." His lips trembled with the pathos of a child who has received an unmerited snubbing. "What ho! who cares?" he cried jerkily. Ferdie took pride in his collection of English slang; a pride which dated back to his enforced return to Germany, thirty-two years ago, with a few typical samples of the period. Stella remembered how he had kept up his forlorn spirits by use of such defiant oddments as "By Jingo," "Here we are again," "It's all my eye and Betty Martin,"—"What's that?" thundered his father, overhearing. Ferdie, blushing crimson, tried to explain that Betty Martin was the name of a lady—and—and the rest was idiom. "You will hold your mouth," came the irritable edict. . . .

Now—"What ho! who cares?" But he was miserable at the necessity for leaving his home. He was at that ripe pippin stage of the late forties when comfort, sentiment, and beaming good-humour make a happy blend of man. His voice had loudened to a hearty geniality. When he sat in a chair, he expanded and filled it out. On the anniversaries of Dorothea's death and of their wedding-day, he did not go to business, but put white flowers under her portrait, and sobbed tenderly and unashamedly over the memories aroused. He liked standing with his carving-knife at the head of his own table, with a well-roasted joint in front of him. He liked Christmas carols, and happy faces, and giving presents to his family, and surprises, and Deb's arms round his neck while she pleaded for some special treat; and songs with a bloom of mellow sadness over them; and a tame landscape with a sort of chubby frolic to it—cottage-children or lambs in the sunshine; and well-worn slippers, and moonlight. If he had continued to live in South Germany, he would no doubt have liked Schumann and beer, and the Lorelei and charcoal-burners and Grimms' Fairy-tales. Perhaps these tastes still lingered on, unsuspected, in his system, subservient to a solemn love for the river Thames; he had given his heart to the Thames while he was still a stripling, and no Rhine-memories could alter the preference. Richard certainly should go to Oxford;

Ferdie looked forward to visiting him there ; to some mysterious festivity entitled Commem.

Above all, perhaps, he loved the sight of lovers. Lovers such as he and Dorothea had been : compounded of joy without ecstasy ; sadness without anguish ; youthful, blushing lovers who held hands, and could be teased and blessed. . . . And later—" the bride was given away by her father." . . . And later still : "—of a girl " . . . who would soon learn to blow on his watch and crow when it flew open.

For of course he was thinking of Deb.

No parental coercion in her case ; no prudent selection by her elders. To that he was pledged ; had not he and Dorothea planned that Deb should seek out her own true mate in her own good time, and bring him home ?

And bring him home. . . . But home was " Daisybanks," Lansdowne Terrace. Ferdie's pleasures were not of the scattered order, but had associated themselves very closely with just that click to the gate, announcing his home-coming every evening ; just that virginia creeper, matting one side of the house in red ; and just that half-acre of garden at the back, where the sweet-william and the canterbury bells repaid so gratefully his careful watering every summer evening, though the hose still leaked at that one faulty portion of rubber tubing.

" We shall have to tell them about that leak, Stella," was all he found courage to say, when his sister informed him that she had already found a tenant to take over their expiring lease, and to buy the furniture.

Stella was the practical person of the family. Stella had beautiful white teeth, and a shrill excitable voice. Because she rattled on incessantly, she was regarded by her contemporaries as a wit ; and her popular entrance into a room was usually hailed uproariously, as though the assembled company had been awaiting its jester. Her secret horror was to be regarded as the traditional narrow-minded and intolerant old maid ; and to avert this she harped facetiously on the topic. She owned a unique collection of the sort of cayenne " good tale " which can always be relied upon to raise at least one blush and one protest ; and so by repartee and impromptu, she managed to achieve an *enfant terrible* reputation, of which she was as vain as younger girls of their conquests. Men called her " a sport," and would often drop into a chair by

her side, with the latest chuckle from *Town Topics* or the *Pink 'Un*—"Nothing shocks Stella Marcus, you know!" . . . and certainly, as far as anything verbal was concerned, Stella fancied herself well in the van of the New Movement. But she did not realize that lip-service was no longer vassal to emancipation; and that: "Do shocking things, not say them all day long," was the up-to-date rendering of Kingsley's advice; did not realize, in fact, that for all her breathless determination, she was not quite able to catch up with Deb's generation.

Deb! . . . of necessity she could not stand for a cipher in Stella's emotions; was bound to arouse love or hatred . . . perhaps the conflict was not yet finally decided. For Deb was not only the daughter she might have borne—if Hermann Marcus had not interposed his bulky will between Stella and Stella's destiny, but also the girl she might have been—again if Hermann had taken the same views of fatherhood as Ferdie. Out of the non-fulfilment of Stella's existence had arisen Deb's present Paradise of liberty; Stella herself perceived that: herself the ashes and Deb the gaily-plumaged phœnix. Ferdie, as a father, needed the tragic example afforded him by his elder sister unmarried—for marriage, when it is obviously a vocation squandered, is as true tragedy as the squandering of some great gift. Stella by nature had been just such a girl as Deb was now. . . . And she did not hate Deb, nor use her authority to baulk the girl where herself had been baulked. To her credit, she took instead a fierce, yet half-amused pride in flaunting Deb's emancipation from control, before the grimly disapproving glare of Deb's grandfather; it was revenge by proxy. . . . "You prevented me from acting thus—and thus—and thus—You have no power here. Look—and look again: this is what I should have been, this is what I should have done. But all the spilt joy has been gathered into another cup—and yours are no more the fingers at the handle!" . . . So Stella's long-shaped greenish eyes danced their wordless triumph at her father; while Deb, innocent of interplay, was frankly and chummily telling Ferdie about some successful impertinence of girlhood.

She did not hate Deb. She did not love her either—at least, not in any tender lullaby ways. If she exulted in Deb's happiness, promoted it wherever possible, defended her against

aggressive comment, nevertheless she was curiously aware all the time that the relations between herself and Deb had not reached completion ; were hovering on the verge of something fundamental and savage of either love or hatred—she did not know. Meanwhile Deb, in her lordly childishness, was heartily fond of Aunt Stel ; and people remarked how nice it was that Miss Marcus and her niece were almost like sisters together !

It was Stella who arranged that they should temporarily move into a boarding-house till Mr Marcus was able to ascertain more exactly what his very reduced income was likely to be. Some of his money was invested abroad, and nobody knew how long the war would last. . . It was best not to enter upon a definite mode of living just now ; and she did not care about house-keeping in apartments ; their own house, or nothing.

Montagu Hall in South Kensington would do very well ; she and Deb were each to have a small single room ; Ferdinand shared a double bedroom with his father, who required a certain amount of attention and nursing. Richard was going to spend Christmas with the Dunnes, and therefore need not be considered till the Easter holidays ; and perhaps by then. . . .

Stella Marcus, for all her caustic, jesting shrewdness, was not aware that those who once acquire the boarding-house habit will continue to say from season to season, from anniversary to anniversary, from year to year : "Perhaps by then . . . ;" will never own that they have settled down to unsettlement.

They drew up with all their baggage at about five o'clock on the second of January. As the front door was opened to them, a voice from the hall rasped out into the foggy air :

"—I like a dog to *be* a dog, not—Shut that door, can't you ? . . . Oh, I see——"

Three men were standing about in the hall, smoking. The owner of the rasp also possessed a long domed head, crude pink where the hair had worn away on top, and a face of the same nursery pink, ploughed by implacable lines of opinion and ill-humour. He stopped his complaint, and stared with curiosity at the newcomers passing through the hall.

CHAPTER IV

I

Deb knelt in front of the squat sturdy oil-stove with "Cora" gold-lettered across its front, and began carefully to trickle a supply of kerosene into the tank. Cora was essential to the evening's enjoyment of her three votaries; their friendship grouped itself round her personality, and Aunt Stella, whose wit ran fatally in the direction of punning, had even dared to nickname their union the Chorus.

Deb knelt, perplexed, musing, a vestal before the altar. . . .

Cora was six weeks old, and was just losing her first fragrance when Deb bought her. . . . "Does anyone want an oil-stove cheap?" she demanded, rushing like tragedy upon the assembled company in the lounge of Montagu Hall Hotel. "With saucepan, feeder, gallon-can, and all my illusions, complete for five-and-tenpence?"

"My dear child!" cried Stella, "Cora has been yours for exactly half a day."

Deb sank down despairingly on the fender-seat. "Five-and-eightpence," she amended. Then, darkly: "To be bested by a rotten little piece of ironmongery one foot by two——!"

"Does she smell?" Jenny Carew exclaimed impulsively; "oh, then something must be wrong with her." (They commented afterwards how queer it was that never for an instant had Cora been "it" to any of them; always "her.") "Do let me take her to pieces for you, and put her together again. Do let me, Miss Marcus. I haven't had a thrill for ages. And if I fail I'll buy the fragments for Bobby to play with. Dolph, who did we last lend our screw-driver to?"

Her husband, morose and bearded, was not interested in Cora. "Somebody who hasn't given it back."

"All right, Mrs Carew; and you can have the bits for Bobby anyway, when you've thrilled long enough. *I* don't want the little brute, whole or in pieces; I would have thrown her out of the window, but just at that moment she threw me out at

the door. She certainly has character, and a perfumed soul, and—and I was so happy, carrying her home in my arms this morning."

Someone spoke indolently from the deepest armchair at the best corner of the fire. "Miss Marcus, I'll buy your disillusion for five-and-eightpence."

"Will you? Will you really? Do you *want* her?" Deb looked across at him shyly. The soldier had not been long at Montagu Hall; rarely spoke, except, lately, to Jenny; and generally did not give an impression that he could be stimulated from a state of sunken lethargy for anybody on earth.

"Not for myself. Heaven forbid! But my men are always shouting for more stoves. Doubt if even Cora could throw half a hundred lusty fusiliers out of their recreation room. I'll have a look at her, if I may."

He and Jenny and Deb went up to the second floor to inspect Cora.

"There she is already . . ." mourned Deb, on the first floor landing.

Presently the three of them were standing with gaze fixed in fascinated silence upon the object for purchase. There was no other illumination in the room; Cora cast her spells in hard blocks of white light and black shadow. . . .

A boarding-house—an oil-stove—the soldier—Jenny Carew—it struck Deb from what a bizarre rag-bag romance drew its patchwork pieces. She stole a look at Burton Ames; he was old; possibly about forty-six; and had an air of being neglected—neglectful: his khaki slouched over his chunky shoulders; his hair, grizzled fawn, was disordered and ragged; the corners of his eyes gathered into wrinkles. Not young, not successful, not handsome, and married . . . she had heard him mention a wife somewhere in the West Country. . . . Preposterous that even for five swift seconds she should have received an impression that the big thing might be hidden here for her—

And then she saw that Jenny's charming little gamin face was alive, and warm, and flickering as firelight; roguery a-chase round her lips; tears on her brown, blunt lashes; promise and mutiny and tenderness . . . what was the matter with Jenny? Slowly the soldier's hand came out and closed tightly round her arm, just above the elbow. . . . Deb, still watching, almost winced at sight of the grip. . . .

And then Ames let go; and flung himself down in the arm-

chair close at hand ; and said, with the content of a man who unexpectedly finds sanctuary : " Let's stop up here. We don't want other people. I'm sick of the trail of other people littering the house. I like it up here."

Yes—but where was the place for Deb, in Deb's room ?

She had no need of married people ; took it for granted that the married man cannot lead by splendid sun-beaten ways to finality ; that a married woman has ever the advantage over a maid, by won tranquillity of experience. She had no need of these two. Then why did they leave it lying about under her notice . . . whatever it was they had found ? The atmosphere was neither amorous nor exotic ; but Deb had an impression as though the eternal man and woman had just come home ; and that at any moment he might commit some little commonplace act—slip off his coat and hand it to Jenny to be mended, to make significant the fact that they were man and woman come home—

—In her room. Petulantly she turned away from sight of Jenny's face . . . could she reach the door and get out before Jenny's lidded emotions brimmed over into action ?—Too late ! . . . Jenny's arms were strangling Deb, Jenny's scorching lips were on Deb's cheek and neck, Jenny's half-sobbing half-laughing runs and murmurings of incoherence were thrown upon the unnatural silence . . . " You darling—darling—darling ! I've wanted to hug you like this since the first night you crept into the lounge. You're such a beautiful little thing . . . isn't she ? Isn't she ? Oh, I'm so happy you're here—do let's all three be pals—I hate everyone else in this beastly place . . . little funny, sorrowful, creamy kid, I like you—I like you——"

And all the while her eyes were on the soldier. And all this boundless slippery exuberance was for the soldier—*at* the soldier—it did not matter upon what pretext it vented itself. Warmth and excitement to spare for Deb too . . . Deb felt this, or she would have torn herself away from the embrace . . . but Jenny was wholly unconscious that she was making love to a man with a girl as the intermediary ; she was no self-analyst. But the soldier and Deb, in one look exchanged, established that mental kinship which exists between those who see things alike introspectively and from the outside view ; with meaning duplicated and tripled ; made grotesque by circumstance or contrast ; backwards from the future, and

twisted this way and that by imps of irony ; kinship of those who can see with the chill impersonality of gods on Olympus, and also with pointed application to their own tiny scheme of things ; restless subtle kinship of those who dream and those who question.

And even as they silently hailed each other, he smiling a little under his fair drawn eyebrows, and she very serious ; hailed each other through the froth and tumble of Jenny's excited talk, the white light which rayed the ceilings and walls of the room, was sucked into soft inky chokiness. . . .

"Little beast has gone out," commented the soldier, in disrespectful reference to Cora. "Light her again, and let's sit round and be comfortable."

II

Of course Deb did not sell Cora.

Round Cora they hacked a sort of intimate privacy, with privileges for their trio alone. Cora was their excuse, the ostentatious cause of their withdrawal from the rest of the boarding-house : they were going to smoke a cigarette with Cora ; they were going to fry potatoes on Cora ; Cora was depressed, and needed the instalment of a fresh wick. Perhaps they rather overdid Cora ; but the intangible need binding them together needed to solve itself into tangible expression. Cora, whether as an exaggerated joke or a temperamental goddess, was . . . convenient. "Are you coming home to Cora to-night ?" or "I saw Cora was lit, so I walked in !" Deb was High Priestess of the Oil-can ; Jenny, principal engineer and mechanic ; and the soldier serenely enjoyed results, as was typical of him.

And then Stella Marcus crystallized their dependence on the Cora legend into a pun. They took up the nickname—"The Chorus meets to-night !"—schoolgirlish methods of allusion . . . but Jenny and the soldier had been battered by realities, and welcomed the silliness of their present relapse. And Deb, her soul a responsive barometer, sank alternately to the soldier's semi-humorous apathy of nothing-worth-while, and leapt again to Jenny's soaring irresponsibility.

The soldier had been thus labelled by Deb in the spirit of irony, when he told her that he had been twenty-three years

in the army, and was not, as she had at first imagined, one of that gallant mushroom crop raised by the call of war. He had been in India and South Africa, Aden, Singapore, Malta and Gibraltar. It was difficult to conceive of anyone less of the accepted military type : an individualist of the let-me-alone order ; an atheist ; a keen but destructive logician ; a hopelessly romantic pessimist ; he could not understand ready-made standards of conduct, of honour, of conviviality ; would not conform to the prevalent disposition to flock together, pray together, stand or fall together. A soldier, even a good soldier, without *esprit de corps,* was a deplorable spectacle ; hardly likely to prove an acquisition to the mess. His fellow-officers, after a perplexed interval of acquaintance, were wont to pronounce him a rum beast. To which, very occasionally, was made the resentful addition : "Tries to be funny"—when Burton Ames unleashed his weary but mordant form of humour. He was more popular with his men, who appreciated the eccentric interest he was prone to waste on them singly and as persons, however much he depreciated them collectively.

Fitly, he should have been apprenticed to some trade or profession which combined the essentials of a sailor, an explorer, a landed proprietor, a hermit and a carpenter. The career of Robinson Crusoe answered all requisites to perfection. . . .

Out of Deb's little crowded room, made vivid by her own books and pictures, he created for himself a sort of amateur desert island, away from the gregarious herd in the smoking-room and lounge and drawing-room downstairs. His own room was bare and uncomfortable, as only a soldier's can be who has many times shifted camp, and without a woman to look after him. And Jenny's larger room was liable to intrusions from Dolph and Bobby. But in Deb's room he hung curtains, and fiddled with Cora, and altered furniture, and smoked his pipe, and examined books, and listened to Deb's wicked imitations of their fellow-boarders, and cooked potatoes by his own home-made method of so many heart-beats to the moment and so many moments to the boil, and confided in Deb and Jenny his love of complete solitude, with ever-deepening tranquillity of mood. Sometimes they all went out together on some impromptu ramble leading to Hampstead Heath or a cinema or a coffee-stall. But usually they were to be found in a careless group round Cora ; Burton Ames lumbering in

the only armchair ; one figure a-sprawl on the bed ; the other flopped on the floor ; accommodation of the soldier's huge inert limbs reducing to nil the already limited space. A clammy February and bleak March urged a desire to huddle, morally and actually. It was scarcely possible for one of them to make a movement without brushing against one of the others. . . . Sometimes Dolph would meander into the room in funereal quest of his wife ; and sometimes Aunt Stella left her rubber of bridge to exchange a few jokes with Major Ames. But for the most part they were tacitly left alone, or unjustly alluded to as a "noisy gang" by Mr Gryce, whose room was below theirs.

Ferdie Marcus was far too glad that Deb was occupied and amused to question the propriety of this bedroom intimacy. If all had gone well, if there had been no war, the poor child would have continued in possession of her own sitting-room in "Daisybanks," where she had formerly received her friends—"ragged" with her friends was the mysterious term applied—Ferdie had, of course, appropriated it to his own use : "Na, my darling, did you have a good rag this evening ?" . . . He gathered she was having a "rag" now ; it was natural to her age ; but everything that Deb did, he whittled to fit this assumption of nature—only natural that the child should want to be out—only natural that the child should want to be at home—"Leave them alone, Stella ; Jenny Carew is always present ; it is only natural that Deb likes the company of young folk. Forty-six, is he ? All the better, then ; a harmless fogey, almost as old as I am ; it livens him up to be with Deb and the pretty little Carew—tells them tales of war . . . ho ! ho ! the new Othello. Only, Stella . . . Papa need not know what is going on—wass ? He would not understand."

Harmless ? Certainly Burton Ames intended to be harmless. He did not believe himself in love with either Deb or Jenny. He valued them for their companionship, for their interest in himself, for their distinct and unique personalities. They were a stimulating find among the heterogeneous nomads of boarding-houses. He thought he liked them as two charming boys. With his scorn for platitudes and for platitudinous happenings, he underrated the dangers of propinquity. If one were careful . . . his careful attitude was his undoing ;

it goaded Jenny and Deb out of shelter. They knew well enough that from their reliance on—well, on Cora, was sure to arise this equation of danger; they courted it, hunted it, even. Ames was such an insistently masculine factor in that room; a girl's room. The very rough feel of his sleeve—Jenny knew . . . every time she moved. . . . And she was a restless creature, forever thrilling her wings.

Jenny was just an atom of life-force, twinkling wildly, all the time, in every direction; jostling to be noticed, petted, admired; a gyrating dizzy mote in the sunslant; a savage little brown bundle of sexual impulses. That was primarily Jenny. Funnily opposed to this, some of her instincts and education and ways of speech were those of the typical surburban sparrow: she was suspicious of people who could correctly pronounce foreign languages; scoffed at what she called "highbrow stuff." What else was Jenny than this? Most of all, perhaps, an insatiable mother; wearing herself out in service to anyone sick or bothered; proud of these calls on her reputation for quick practical efficiency. Cooking, bandaging, scrubbing—she had five brains on each hand. Her notion of spoiling a beloved person was by virtue of touch . . . a smother of kisses . . . chair and cushions and fire . . . healing contact of warm flesh upon flesh . . . cosseting ways that were all the realities she knew or cared about. "That sort of rubbish never did anyone a bit of good!" she would interrupt with almost shrewish impatience, when Deb and the soldier were astray in realms ethical or fantastic. Life was four walls and a roof—babies within, and the smell of dinner, and sacrifice, and somebody crying, and body's pain. . . . A little fun to be squeezed in at the cracks; fun that was substantial, and never ethereal; fun that was crowds and a pretty dress, a waltz, chocolates, a bottle of wine, a ride in a motor-car. . . .

And love was just touch again—for Jenny.

Jenny had no reserves and no discrimination; she could hastily damn a stranger to perdition without any attempt at sane reasoning—and a week later one would find her impenitently ensconced at the other extreme of judgment. She was not actually beautiful: a small, round head, and a small round chin; brown sloe eyes tilted at the outer corners; round the eyes and mouth a crinkling resemblance, mirthful, mournful, to a baby monkey; Bobby, her young son, had inherited

this. But her eyebrows were delicate umber sickles on the low white forehead. And she could look all things in a second's space of time. . . .

Jenny had been given sordid tragedy for her lot on earth: poverty of the shoddiest kind; illness that had brought her three times gaspingly close to death. And she had come out well in the test . . . better, perhaps, than a schooled philosopher. Loyal to Dolph, competent in the bread-struggle, plucky in the very extremities of pain. To Deb and the soldier she was a sort of Complete Home on tour. He, especially, seemed to rely on her for the daily wants of an ordinary man adrift and ill. For he was already a victim of the war; shell-shock and neurasthenia had left him incompetent for any more strenuous job than his present light ordnance duties. Jenny rejoiced in the very egoism which brought him to her at all times with some slow ponderous helplessness to confide: "Look here—what am I to do?"—She gave prodigally, without thought of barter. And as between her husband and Ames existed that casual masculine friendship which blooms mainly on the borrowing and lending of matches, she was able, under cover of this, to cosset him to her heart's content; run into his room with soup and custards when he was laid up, ask for his clothes to patch and darn—all the little real things . . . advantages of a married woman again. . . . Deb fretted against her own disabilities. It seemed that Jenny, without cheapening herself in the soldier's esteem, could softly trail her fingers across his furrowed brows . . . murmur: "Darling, how hot your head is!" . . . Deb's modesty bled in scarlet on her cheeks and neck. Jenny, how can you? how can you? . . . and oh, if I could only do the same! But she was still dream-crusted with the convention that a man shall avow, and a girl deny or concede; could not force herself to reverse the process, even though Jenny scored—scored all the time. . . . The soldier's head lay for an instant drawn back against Jenny's shoulder. Jenny, magically stilled by the contact, was crooning a song that the sea might have composed to the beloved vessel at last in harbour. Deb, wistful of the other's frank facility in wooing, redly ashamed lest the soldier should despise it, hating Jenny for giving him cause to despise it, mutinous at her own instinctive adherence to girlhood's creed, Deb whispered to herself in promise for this empty moment: "When I am married. . . ."

III

"When I am married"—and marriage is found with love as surely as the picture-coupon in the opened packet of cigarettes, inessential but inevitable. Yet here she had fallen in love where no ultimate together-being was possible; even no passionate response forthcoming. Then was this love at all? —hitherto accepted as a divided flame burning to some splendid fulfilment. . . .

Deb knelt in front of Cora, perplexed, musing; a vestal before the altar. What if she had envisioned the altar of romance as a mountain-peak in the sunset? Here it was a mat before an oil-stove. An altar, nevertheless, where she made painful sacrifice of illusion. For love was complete in itself, without past or future. She might not put eager question, before admitting love: is he young? is he free? does he care? does it hold chance of the final happiness? But she must accept it, barren and bitter and an unshared burden, a journey without ultimate lure of rest. Love was the big thing—the conviction remained. Only she had thought it conditional. And it was absolute.

. . . Slowly she lit a match, and applied it to the wick. From the mirrors and walls of the many-cornered room, a dozen Debs rendered variation of her dense black hair, her thick storm-grey eyes, and lustreless ivory skin. For Deb's looks were of that mutable type which inspired every fourth-rate art faddist to paint her Holding a Melon; or in a Blue Jacket; or with head flung back against their favourite bit of Chinese drapery; or absorbed in the contents of a dust-bin (symbolic realism); or as a figure on an Egyptian frieze; or as Mary Magdalene; or as a Wood-nymph pursued by Silenus; or as a coster girl dancing to a barrel organ by naphtha-lights; or merely as "Deborah, an Impression"—till the sight of Deb herself was a repose from these fantastic and distorted relics of pre-war art-phases.

Deb as Reverie of a Girl, was so absorbed that she let the match burn down to her fingers before she was recalled to actualities. Quickly she let it drop; and at the same moment Jenny rushed in:

"The Chorus is off for to-night, Deb; isn't it a shame? Mad'm lloraine is giving a squawking party in her room, and you and I have been specially invited."

This was catastrophe.

"Oh Jenny—*must* we? Hasn't she invited the soldier?"

"Out of compliment to us two, yes. But she can't stick him, really, because he doesn't jump about opening doors like a foreign monkey-on-a-stick."

"I wish he *would* open some doors—to-night. I know exactly what will happen, Jenny: La llorraine will say: 'Come, now we will be truly cosy!'—and immediately block all forms of ventilation. And then she'll sing as if she were let loose again in the Paris opera-house, and I shan't know if it's my head bursting, or the walls and ceiling, or her voice. Old Gryce will object, and so will grandpapa, but they won't take any steps, because each one will be afraid of putting a stop to something that is annoying the other more than himself——"

"Darling idiot, why did you ever say you wished you could hear her sing?"

Deb wailed: "I didn't know that it meant a prima-donna's powerful mezzo-soprano in a bed-sittingroom already containing two suites of Louis Quinze furniture, and forty-two cases of fur cloaks, and a permanent dog with permanent asthma, and an anthracite stove fire, and a grand piano, and complicated domestic arrangements for producing food at a moment's notice, and a clothes-line, and litter from their last year's variety entertainment, and My Child My Solace complete with curls——"

Jenny stopped laughing as the last item was catalogued. "Dolph's potty about her. . . ."

"About Manon . . ." Deb nodded gravely. She and everybody else had noticed what was so blatantly happening. She cuddled on the floor beside Jenny's knees, and leant her cheek against the other's dangling hand; then she slid her lips along the smooth warm arm the whole way up to the elbow. . . . One comforted Jenny by Jenny's own methods.

For the coming of La lloraine and her daughter to the second floor of Montagu Hall Hotel had made a difference to the Chorus. It was not so tight-fitting. A rival cluster of intimacy had been established by the newcomers, Stella Marcus, and Dolph Carew; and Jenny was perforce drawn into it from time to time . . . Dolph was insistent that she should be kind to Manon, aged sixteen. And La llorraine, with her overpowering conviviality, had sought to make an undivided

bohemian settlement out of the bedroom inhabitants of the second floor ; all doors open at all times, and a general pooling of minor difficulties. . . . " Now Stella, my dee-urr, will you be kind and count me *that* washing while Manon play with Bobby Carew and I buy a *von*-derful cream cheese for the Countess who dejeuners with me in my room to-day. Then need I say, my dee-urr, that I expect you to com' in and share." And Stella, who took delight in La llorraine, replied : " Chère Madame, you are as generous with your Countess as with your cheese."

La llorraine stood for the Continent, as the Continent ached in the memory of those who had loved it before 1914. Not for any one country or another, but for all the gay cities : Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, St Petersburg . . . irrespective of the distinctions of war. Actually, she was born in some small town on the divisions of Russia and Poland. Her present appellation, which covered stage and private use, could, in its initial eccentricity only be explained by the admiration awakened in her on first encounter with ffoulkes, ffolliott, and ffrench. . . . " My dee-urr, but what an advertisement ! Bah—I know how to catch *that* public by the ear. They are swine, I tell you . . . but this will br-r-ring them in millions. You will see ! " So she became La llorraine. And as La llorraine, she stood for every aspect of continental life ; garret, and hotel and court ; grande dame, and then third-rate mummer ; the popular artiste, or the good thrifty woman who can cook succulent dishes for her household. Physically, she was built on a magnificent scale, and always wore plain and expensive black—save for breakfast, when she horrified the boarding-house by appearing in a soiled dressing-gown, red-and-gold Turkish slippers, and a knitted blue woollen shawl over the short dyed yellow hair which formed such a crazy mop to her clear-cut aristocratic face, long and pale, with kind eyes and delicate, sneering mouth. There was no adventure of the demi-monde too lurid for imagination to cast her as heroine ; and against that she could whisper mysterious tales of court intrigue, and call Grand-Dukes by their pet names, with an air that betrayed her a careless participant of their intimate revels.

Fiercely she adored Manon, whose hair hung in streaked yellow curls over her shoulders, and from whose red, greedy little wolf's mouth one could envisage the dart of a red pointed

little tongue. Manon fulfilled all expectations as the foreign *ingénue*: soft, lisping voice, demure eyelids. In a frequent spasm of recollection, La llorraine would dismiss her from the room when the conversation was too adult for due preservation of a maiden's bloom; but on those occasions that her mother forgot to dismiss her, no doubt Manon picked up much valuable information. . . . Certainly, whether from innocence or art, she managed Dolph Carew exquisitely, never seeming aware of an infatuation so blatant that it shrieked itself aloud at every moment; yielding not a dewdrop of her freshness to his importunity; and at the same time contriving to keep him attached and useful. "My dee-urr," La llorraine declaimed to Stella Marcus, "such a clown for my Manon?—not for anything in *that* world. I have . . . plans for her!" . . . a queer impression stealing on the heels of her remark, that Manon was designed to be mistress of a third-rate illegitimate royalty of a fourth-rate kingdom. . . . A faded Louis drawing-room in vieux-rose—an old *roué* bowing his entrance . . . waxed moustache and imperial . . . careful buttonhole. . . . "I have sent for my little daughter!" regally from La llorraine.

Grumbling prophecies were afloat in Montagu Hall, that some catastrophe was bound soon to happen among that second-floor crowd—the Carews, the Marcuses, Burton Ames, and— with vindictive inflexion—those disreputable mummers! It was really getting insupportable; and fancy Mrs Carew taking no steps about her husband's ridiculous behaviour with that nasty little thing in ringlets, but to be instead forever running after Major Ames, who isn't *my* idea of an officer—not at all well-set-up—and the noise—and in and out of the bedrooms—how Mr Marcus can allow his daughter . . . but it isn't as if they were English, no, nor Dutch either, although they never said they were. Did you know that they dressed up on Christmas Eve, all the lot of them, and had a procession up and down the stairs, and the—girl—wore—tights?——

Thus Deb mimicked with diabolical accuracy, the existing Drawing-room Opinion.

"And very attractive you looked in 'em, darling!"

"Jenny, I believe when our gang was singled out for influenza last month, they looked on it as an awful visitation of justice; a sort of plague of Egypt."

" Perhaps it was. Everyone in the house escaped it except our landing. Do you remember the day I had bolted five aspirin, and the soldier sauntered in, and looked at me, and thought I was dying, and gasped out: ' Oh, I w-won't detain you.' Ass !—but I think it saved my life, I laughed so. And the night I was so awfully bad that Dolph specially got up out of bed to make a cup of Bovril for Manong ? "

" Don't, Jenny ! I . . . I hated him, that time."

" Ah, well, I've had some jolly enough razzles with old Dolph ; he can't help it when he gets taken this way." Into Jenny's tones had crept that note of possessive defence that one hears from the woman in the police-court, shrewishly denying the black eye given her by her " man." " Poor old boy ! he's gloomier than ever ; but then I married him because he reminded me so of Martin Harvey. Dolph says that Manong makes him feel pure again, which is out of my line as I forfeited my purity in his sight by having married him. It sounds a bit mixed up, and I don't quite see where I come in—with the washing on Saturday morning, I s'pose. Only I'm hanged if I don't have my little fling too."

" Does Dolph mind the soldier ? "

" Lately he does ; haven't you noticed ? yellow with jealousy ; tries to keep both eyes on his wife, and not lift them off Manong ; wants to confide his woes in me, and take the high moral stride as well. Can't be done, my lad ! But it was quite a rag during the 'flue, Deb ; we were all able to take patterns of each other's dressing-gowns, weren't we ? La llorraine in ermine and her head tied up in a duster was a treat. She and your aunt can tell some smoke-room stories when they get started—my word ! Dolph was shocked—afraid Manong would hear."

" The soldier was bad that one week."

" Wasn't he ? And wouldn't let me do much for him either, worse luck. I almost wondered if I should have wired for his wife, off my own bat. But he'd have been so furious."

" Why ? doesn't he like her ? "

" Child—don't you know ? he's crazy about her. . . ."

" Oh. . . ."

" *Didn't* you know ? Why else do you suppose he's so precious backward with *us* ? Hang it, Deb, we're not exactly unattractive. The chances he's had. . . . Another man would have worn my throat away with his lips at it, before

now!" Jenny clenched her hands passionately. "Deb, haven't you noticed that he's never kissed either of us?"

"Yes. I had noticed."

"He told me the whole story, mooching about the streets in a fog one night. He had fooled about with some chit, not caring for her a tuppenny curse—as he might have fooled with us. Someone told his wife; and she just gave him notice to quit—'I'll send for you when I can bear the sight of you again!' . . . that was four years ago. God! she must be made of ice. With a war on, too. Can't she guess that the man wants looking after; and that if her fingers don't sew his buttons on, someone else will volunteer for the job. Not that I've had much from him, except thanks, for trying to buck him up and brush him up . . . a more dejected-looking object I've never seen than when he first slouched in here. Thanks? oh yes, he thanked me then, in the fog, for having listened to his drivellings; as if I could have helped myself, with his hand grabbing my elbow; I was bored stiff. That was before you came in with us, kid."

"I'll drop out again. . . . You're married, Jenny, and so is he, and you can fit each other with what's left over. But I want something whole——"

"Yes; you've got everything to give. But you and I might just as well go on being pals, darling,—he doesn't care a rap for either of us. And he'd be terrified of me without you, Deb; or of you without me. I've never struck such a Cautious Willy. When he's left alone with one of us he goes to fetch his pipe—till the other comes back. I tell you, it works up all the devil in me. . . ."

"And in me. . . ."

"Deb, he's a *real* man, or I shouldn't care like this. He's been perfectly sweet to me once or twice. Perfectly . . . dear. He can be, when he likes. Have you ever felt the muscles of his arm? ever bent it back? like iron. Deb—I'm sure he's sworn some gimcrack oath to himself, not to ever let it reach a kiss—with us, I mean."

"Because of her."

"Why shouldn't we set ourselves to break it down? After all, she must be a beast. And she should have kept him while she had him. It's our innings. Deb, I bet you a gallon of oil for Cora that one or the other of us gets a kiss from him to-night. I'm mad to-night—mad—game for anything! . . .

There ! I forgot that blooming party next door. Mad'm's got a pal in to play her accompaniments ; she won't let us off ; not just for a Chorus meeting."

A conspirator's rap at the door ; the soldier thrust his head stealthily round the corner ; ascertained with relief that both members of the Chorus were present ; and entered, pulling from his pocket a smoked haddock by its tail.

" I've brought a present for Cora ; two presents," from the other pocket he extracted a tin of asparagus. " Shall we revel up here to-night, as a thanksgiving ? I don't know for what ; but I'm in the mood." His brick-coloured face was impassive ; his voice slow and toneless ; his entire personality redolent of beef decently roasted and eaten at the proper time at a proper table. Anyone more obviously opposed to riotous revels, or to moods of any kind, it would be hard to imagine.

" H'm . . . I believe we shall have to divide the haddock before we cook it," Jenny speculated with a dubious eye on Cora's limitations, while Deb ruefully explained their evening's engagement.

" Damn," said the soldier gently. " Am I invited ? I won't go. I have to sit at attention when I hear music, or else I don't look as if I were listening. And that's so tiring. Look here, I can't endure an evening without you two ; honestly I can't. Why not pretend to be ill, one of you ? " Hastily he amended : " Both of you."

" *I* can ; I've been feeling frightfully rotten on and off lately, since the 'flue. My heart's gone funny from too many operations, or too many aspirin, or something. We could go in next door for about ten minutes, and then I'll pretend I'm taken suddenly bad, and slip out in a I-hope-nobody-will-notice-or-make-a-fuss manner ; and Deb will naturally follow me out, looking—what's the word, you high-brows ? sol—? sol—? something to do with lawyers."

" Looking solicitous. Right then ; I'll skulk about on the landing till I hear you. Say I'm out for the evening. That's settled. We can always throw Jenny on the bed, and me under it, if anybody knocks to enquire. You'd better put the haddock in your wash-basin for the present, Deb."

" And please, where am I to wash ? "

Ames thought it over. He bestowed on every question, great or small, exactly the same amount of stolid phlegm. " In Jenny's room."

" Not available. Dolph and Manong are spooning in there."

"Alone?"

"Oh, you bet Mad'm or Miss Marcus or Bobby is with them. Our precious flapper mayn't go a second unchaperoned. It's hard luck on Dolph."

"Dear Jenny, your point of view as Dolph's wife is rather a novel one."

"Excuse me, but is Jenny here?" A very aggrieved Carew stood on the threshold, glaring at his wife through an enmuffling tangle of beard and eyebrow. He was incredibly like the popular notion of a bushranger. Actually he had been traveller for a wholesale tobacco firm in the City. And was now out of work.

"Jenny, you might think of a fellow sometimes, I must say. Bobby keeps on running out of the room, and I've always got to haul him back. And you know quite well what Mad'm is like about Manong. Why don't you sit with us and do some sewing till Bobby's bed-time? You're so selfish."

Another ferocious glare—and Dolph was gone.

"Charming fellow, isn't he?" remarked Jenny lightly. She shrugged her shoulders, and followed him out.

The soldier looked at Deb expressively: "Bit thick, isn't it?'

"I hate Dolph Carew!"

"He doesn't count. But she—she's the pluckiest little soul in England. One can't interfere, that's the worst of it."

"Why can't one? Because one might compromise oneself?"

He smiled a little at her passionate scorn, accepting the implication calmly. "Yes. Partly that."

"Mostly that."

"You admire rash impulse, and headlong defiance, and all those virtues that make a muddle in the world, don't you?" —From teasing Deb, he awoke to awful realization that he was alone with her. "I say—I must be off!"

"Yes, hurry!—a whole half-minute." Daringly she challenged his unspoken thought.

"Ridiculous child. Remember to put the haddock in the basin." He just touched her shoulder . . . all his warmer marks of affection were reserved for the times when the Chorus was present in full membership . . . and went out.

IV

Deb crossed straight to the long mirror, and made the discovery that she had not been looking beautiful enough to say

what she had said. She began to dress for the evening with a sort of revengeful deliberation. The deliberation was necessary to ensure good result. No wise woman can fly, with spirit aflame, into her clothes, and then hope to prove seductive. The dash was in her spirit, nevertheless. She was angry with the big thing for not proving the mellow, englamoured sanctuary she had every right to expect. This evolution of a dream into fact was futile; worse than that—destructive—to herself. A stupid, lop-sided business! Deb was not glad of love now it had come. Only a troublesome but intelligent honesty kept her from repudiating it altogether as the big thing; returning to her former state of silver-misty anticipation. . . . "One can pretend, I suppose?"—pretend that the soldier was a mere wayside incident. Only she knew too much about wayside incidents, to commit that error.

—Well then, since she was so sure, were not the issues worth a forced initiative on her part? Could she compete with Jenny's boldness—if she chose? For with Deb, as with Jenny, the soldier's steady, profiting self-control had become a nightmare which had to be exchanged at all costs, even for his scorn, even for self-destruction, even for evil. . . .

Her temper resolved itself into action. There was mischief in her selection of the pure ivory taffeta dress, the golden shoes, and cobwebby gold stockings that the supple fancy could continue on limbs straight and slender inside the blown white cup of her skirts. Deb could wear white and pearl and dove-tints without fear of looking miss-ish; by contrast with her deep colours, they enhanced her vivid grace more than the traditional purple or flame. Sufficient of purple in her sombre twilight eyes; flame enough in her lips. Her hair she turned inwards, concealing its masses so skilfully, that, sleek on top and bulging rhythmically into a smooth pear-shape round the cheeks and the nape of the neck, it gave her somewhat the appearance of the knave of clubs as pictured in a pack of cards.

Then she went back to the mirror, and scrutinized her looks long and earnestly, and—like all heroines in every crisis of each love-affair—reflected how queer it was that just these curves and colours should have been the haphazard outward accessories to—her soul? . . . no, souls were mawkish things!—to her essential Deb-ness.

CHAPTER V

I

The girl who was playing the accompaniments to La Ilorraine's singing glanced aside once or twice from Deb to Jenny, contrasting mystery and mobility. Jenny attracted her the most; she made up her mind to speak to Jenny directly the song was over. . . . And then she saw Jenny bite her lip, clutch tightly at the arm of the chair . . . after a minute or two of apparent bodily agony, rise and grope an unsteady way through the edges and corners of furniture, to the door. Antonia Verity went on with the Aria from "Samson et Delila." She had seen a swift look interchanged between Deb and Jenny, just before the spasm of pain which drove the latter from the room. Also, in the instant's silence before the prima-donna had begun to let herself go in "Mon cœur s'ouvre a ta voix," Antonia fancied she had detected a scraping sound and heavy breathing outside the door.

Stella had also remarked Jenny's symptoms, and half rose to follow her out without interrupting the singing; but Deb murmured: "All right, Auntie, I'll go" . . . and slipped noiselessly in Jenny's wake. Dolph was wrapt up in Manon, who was wrapt up in her own indifference to Dolph. And La Ilorraine was back in the Paris opera-house, eyes uplifted to the imaginary tiers of packed faces, voice soaring resonantly to a non-existent acoustic. . . . Antonia wondered if the drum of her left ear were being shattered; she also wondered a little what was afoot outside the door. . . .

II

"Did you hear me sleuthing?" queried Ames, contentedly lopping the haddock to fit Cora's limitations.

"Is *that* what you were doing? Of course we heard." The three had been recently present at a cinema film which

portrayed a quantity of flickering doors, set in a flickering corridor, down which a flickering procession of waiters, detectives and gentlemen burglars—all impartially in evening dress—portrayed the diverting art of sleuthing: they skulked along close to the wall, one arm shielding their eyes to avoid observation, and at every bedroom door they bent and applied an ear to the keyhole—then started erect, confirmed in their worst suspicion, and went to the next keyhole. . . .

"I sleuthed all over the house, till I sleuthed outside Miss Lamb's door——" he stopped abruptly.

"And then?"

"Then I stopped sleuthing. It's an ignoble pastime. Get me my screw-driver; something's wrong with Cora." A minute later he was completely happy, surrounded by Cora in eleven fragments; while Jenny, very excitable and talkative, enacted to him exactly how she had been "taken ill" during La llorraine's song.

"—There. Now she'll do."

"There was nothing wrong with Cora; you wanted an excuse to pull her to bits," Deb accused him.

"A man is only a child; he must play."

"Fiddling at things?"

"Tinkering with things. Pottering over things. That's a mercy!" as Dalila, on the other side of the wall, died to silence. "Our invalid had better be hoisted on to the bed; they'll be coming in to enquire."

Just in time Jenny hurled herself among the pillows, and drew the quilt up to her flushed cheeks. A knock at the door. The soldier eliminated himself against the wall. Deb went softly to the threshold: "Is that you, Manon? . . . Yes, she's in here. . . . No, I wouldn't come in; she . . ." Deb backed the unseen visitor onto the landing. The other two, listening breathlessly, heard her low, capable, reassuring explanations: ". . . be all right presently . . . room too hot . . . strain of the last few weeks . . . might do her good . . . tell them not to worry. . . ."

Jenny inserted a moan of corroboration.

"I'm so vairry sorry——" from Manon.

Deb returned to the room, closing the door. And Jenny cried:

"Little humbug! much she cares!"

"Well, nurse, shall we operate?" demanded Ames cheerily.

He stood at the bedside, assuming a professional manner, one finger on the patient's pulse. "Um. Um. This is excellent. We shall soon be all right. Up to-day and down to-morrow and dead the next day. A great improvement here, nurse. I should give her . . ." he drew the pseudo-nurse aside to a little distance, dropping his voice to a grave undertone. Jenny burst out laughing at the foolery—then shuddered—and laughed again:

"Bravo! It's the real thing. God—how often I've seen 'em do just that at the hospitals and nursing-homes. I've been turned inside out and put on the table so often, I wonder there's any of me left kicking. Like poor old Cora over there—the doctors had all the fun, tinkering and fiddling."

"It *sounds* fun, when you put it like that," Ames said appreciatively. And drew a clumsy penknife from his pocket. "Where will you have it?" he demanded considerately, throwing off his coat and rolling up his shirt-sleeves.

"Deb! Deb!" shrieked Jenny, in hysterical appeal.

Deb flung herself to the rescue. She and the soldier sleuthed each other malevolently round the room, he with the penknife and she with the screw-driver, till they ended up with a neat little burlesque of a murder in the middle of the carpet; La llorraine, next door, supplying unconscious atmosphere by the torture scene from "Tosca."

"Die!" said Deb lightly.

"With my fingers buried in your raven tresses!"

"Miscreant!"

"Don't call me names. I'm not."

"You are."

"I'm *not*!" he tried to hoist himself up by the coarse black ropes of her loosened hair. Deb resisted fiercely. Jenny, tossing from one side to another, called out petulantly that she was forgotten—it was *her* party!—and was half off the bed, before another knock sent her flying back to the shelter of the coverlid. The soldier lurched into his special arm-chair and took up the screw-driver—"for a disguise," he murmured. And Deb, wildly dishevelled, clutched after her expression of calm but anxious best friend to the invalid.

Antonia Verity entered, with a glass of tea and a slice of lemon.

"They thought this might do you good," to Jenny, who extended a feeble hand, took the glass, raised it shakily to her

lips, spilt a few drops, smiled bravely—then, with a sudden gesture of repugnance, handed it to Deb. "Presently, dear . . . not now."

Deb was surprised that she did it so well. Usually Jenny was prone to over-act.

After a single look bestowed upon the perplexing and unexplained presence of a gentleman in shirt-sleeves cooking asparagus over an oil-stove, Antonia's eyes returned to Jenny:

"I thought you were shamming just now, in the next room. But I was wrong. I'm sorry."

She lingered a moment, seemingly in expectation. But the atmosphere was feverish and hostile. "I'm sorry," she repeated; and went.

"Jenny, you're a genius! that bit of bye-play with the glass was magnificent."

"I am, I am, aren't I?—'I thought you were shamming, but I was wrong,'" she mimicked triumphantly. "—Oh Hell!" and burrowed her face sharply into the pillow.

"What is it?" alarmed, Deb sprang forward.

"You taken in too?" Jenny, without lifting her head, broke into shrill peals of laughter which she seemed unable to repress. "Oh—oh—oh—I've taken you in too! . . . Dearest—" this in response to the soldier's fingers roaming at the nape of her neck—"Don't pull your hand away—don't—it's heavenly—it soothes me. . . . What does it matter? we're all playing the fool; Dolph is playing the idiot in the other room; we're all mixed up, anyway. Deb, give me that tea—I'm crazy with thirst," she snatched the glass; gulped down the contents. "What about those asparagus?"

"They ought to be done enough now; you shall have some if you're good. What do you think, nurse? one or two? and the rest for us."

Deb nodded professionally. But it struck her that Jenny was rather making capital out of the privileges of her present rôle. Why had she not thought to be herself the one who was ill? But Jenny was really ill so often—it was less likely to cause suspicion.

The soldier removed the tin of asparagus from Cora; and seating himself on the edge of the bed, began to curl them slowly, tantalizingly, into Jenny's mouth. "I've never seen you look quite so healthy; in case any more of the neighbours drop in to enquire, we may as well cast a dissembling shadow

on that blooming cheek, those brilliant brown eyes. Deb, put out the light."

Deb obeyed. The asparagus were finished, one by one. A crash of discordances, as though someone had suddenly sat on the keys of the piano, sounded from the adjoining room; and La llorraine's wild, deep laughter. Jenny lay as though exhausted, nuzzling against Burton Ames' shoulder.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"So miserable . . . and I'm tired of going on."

"I am, too. Never mind—it's not so bad being miserable together."

"You're rather nice"—then lower still—"kiss me. . . ."

He laid his cheek down against her's—no more. But she seemed content . . . and Deb turned away; stood, forlornly enough, with her back to the bed, looking down at Cora. . . . "I'm miserable too," she whispered. But Jenny heard:

"Deb!—Deb, come over here—come over to me at once. How dare you not come . . . feeling like that? Deb!"

Deb crouched beside the bed, with Jenny's arms tightly wound about her shoulders. The soldier's knee, hard as granite, pressed against her side. They were all three very near together . . . a magnetic sense of rest was born in this close contact—Jenny's hot skin, Deb's tumble of hair, harsh feel of the soldier's frayed tweed coat. . . . There was no other illumination in the room, and Cora cast her spells in hard blocks of white light and black shadow.

"Good old Chorus," breathed Jenny.

"You're a really-and-truly person, Jenny, aren't you?"

"Sweetheart, what do you mean?"

"I used to ask about people in stories: are they really-and-truly real? Somehow I always know that you are; at least you, if nobody else."

"Of course she is," grunted Ames; "considering she's a Christian, quite remarkably real."

"Hush!" quickly Jenny laid her fingers over his mouth; "you must leave me that at least—my religion."

"Child, child, religion is a man-made door, blocking all hope of vistas beyond."

"Faith is a crystal window," whispered Jenny, her brown eyes steadfast.

"Maybe. Nothing so opaque as crystal."

Deb said reproachfully: "What can you give her to hang on to, for what you take away?"

"Herself. The courage and pride in her. It's much more comforting really than a vague hope that God will come to the rescue in extremes. You can be definitely certain of the measure of your own powers; but God is at best a gamble."

Jenny's eyes strayed fearfully ceilingward. . . .

"Looking for the thunderbolt that will destroy the blasphemer?"

"I remember looking up in just that way, the first time I said damn," Deb murmured reminiscently.

"It's what we learn at our mother's knee. We've all got mother's knees in our system—Jenny here worst of all—and till we learn to see through it——"

"Your metaphor is in peril, as well as your soul."

"S.O.S.," he laughed.

But at this tendency of the conversation to become high-brow, Jenny's mood, as usual, flickered to restlessness. "I ought to go and see if Bobby's all right; I haven't been in all the evening."

"You forget that you're in a highly critical condition, and mustn't be seen dancing about the corridors. I'll go."

And Deb wondered, as she closed the door behind her, if, in her absence, Jenny would contrive to win the gallon of oil for Cora. . . .

Bobby was soundly asleep in his cot; his round, monkey face, so comically a replica of Jenny's, snuggled half under the bed-clothes to meet his huddled-up knees. Deb was compelled to bend and lightly kiss him, for the sake of her private fondness for all small boys. A night-light floating on the table beside him was suddenly quenched. Deb turned to grope her way out of the room. She heard a groan behind her—and, for Bobby's sake, bit back a sharp scream of terror—

"It's only me," came Dolph's despondent reassurance.

"You? But I thought you were with—with the others."

"They don't want me."

She hung about uncomfortably, her hand on the door-knob.

"Jenny's better," she volunteered at last.

"Is she?" quite indifferent. Then he burst out: "Deb, d'you know that I'll be rich one day, when my uncle dies. Rich. People will treat me differently then. I tell you, Deb, money does everything with some people. Not with a young

girl, of course—but with their mothers. I'm nobody now. Anyone can insult me, give me the sack. I wish I was dead and buried. . . . Bobby oughtn't to be left the whole evening alone ; tell Jenny I said so. That's why I'm in here ; that's why ; the only reason," he mumbled. "Else why shouldn't I be with the others ? "

Apparently some shattering of the next-door alliance had occurred on this evening of happenings.

"Send Jenny in to me. I won't sit alone. Why should I ? She's always shut away with you and Ames, when I want her. —Deb, I'm so wretched."

"Yes . . . but I don't like you one bit," reflected Deb. Aloud she said : "I expect it'll be all right to-morrow, Dolph ; La llorraine has sudden moods, like all artists."

It was queer, this all-round tacit acceptance of unofficial affections, on the second floor landing at Montagu Hall.

Carew merely groaned again ; which Deb interpreted as welcome dismissal.

III

. . . Had Jenny won that kiss in her absence ?—Deb slid open the door, in a bewilderment of dread and curiosity. *Had* Jenny——

Impossible to say. For La llorraine was sitting on the bed, eclipsing by gesticulation and oratory, a helplessly recumbent invalid. The soldier was calmly smoking and reading in the armchair at the farther end of the room, his back to the bed, Cora among his feet. His presence in the room seemed almost part of the general acceptance. How funny, Deb thought, if they all suddenly started questioning and sorting and clearing up. . . .

It appeared that Nadya lloraine, at least, was doing something of the sort.

"My dee-urr, now listen to me. I tell you how to win back *that* husband of yours. I have said to me : it is enough now, it shall end ! Jenny, see how you lie here, wizout a manicure, your hair in a puzzle, a blouse that has no seduction. . . . And he, that fool, that booby,—shall I tell you vat vill happen ? he falls into the hands of adventuresses ! My dee-urr, they snap him up from you . . ." Sincerity of pity for the abandoned wife dominated any personal association with the said adven-

turesses. "They snap him up—and spit him out!" La llorraine dignified the process by accompanying pantomime, grotesquely mimicked by the enormous shadow cast on the wall behind her. "I will tell you *that* secret, Jenny, my dee-urr, which I 'ave learn: you must be woman to him as well as wife. . . ." She grasped Jenny's wrist, swooped forward, and lowered her tones to a key of thrilling confidence. She breathed in Jenny's face. She took possession of Jenny.

Deb and the soldier were cut off to a complete isolation.

"What have you got?" she bent over his shoulder to see the title of the book he held. "Oh, that's not fair!" indignantly. For the Chorus had been half-reading half-acting Shaw's "Pygmalion" for their mutual amusement; and he had anticipated that portion of the play to which Deb had been secretly straining forward.

"You wanted to make sure of being Eliza in that bit where she throws the slippers, of course. You're a shocking savage, Deb. And anyway, the part isn't fit for any gentlewoman, and naturally falls to me. You can be Higgins."

"I won't be Higgins. I'll be Eliza. You—you tempt slippers."

"M'yes—I daresay I do. Slippers are mild. I'll lend you my trench boots."

"Thanks."

"Why do you hate me so, Deb?" lazily he threw back one hand to where she was still leaning over his chair, and grasped some of her hanging hair.

She was exultant at having at last urged him to a personal reflection. "Because you don't take enough notice of me," she replied, in a freakish impulse of candour.

"Dear Eliza, isn't my step bent straight for this room, when I enter the house?"

"That's because of—Cora. Because we make you comfortable."

"I suppose it is. Funny hair you've got, Eliza; like a strong, stormy black sea. I thought women's hair was always fluffy and soft."

"As one woman's was? . . ." flitted through Deb's mind. But she did not say it.

He still examined with minute interest the thick tress which lay across the palm of his hand. "To a man of ingenuity and resource, it would be useful for all sorts of things

if one were wrecked on an island ; Eliza, I wish I could be stranded on a desert island with your hair."

" With . . . only my hair ? " She was breaking through it now, that nameless barrier which her nameless creed had set up ; useless barrier, Jenny had shown her. . . . Yes, but Jenny was different. Because she was married ?—well, because she was different. Because she let her passions bubble over when and where and how she chose . . . unruly, undisciplined Jenny. But Deb had promised herself to compete with Jenny this time. . . . A pulse ticked in each wrist —two frantic little clocks. On the other side of the wall someone—Antonia probably—was playing Debussy . . . mournful, soul-flattening discordances . . . La llorraine's rush of inaudible speech still expounded man and the ways of man :

" And I say to 'im, *that* minute ago even, my dee-urr : ' You should kneel to your wife like a thief to a goddess, for you 'ave r-r-robbed 'er of all 'er gifts ! ' Ha ! 'e did not like that, Jenny, I tell you. He sulks now in his room, the booby——"

" Well, it *was* rude, considering he was your guest," from Jenny, in shrill defence of her male property.

. . . " What should I do with the rest of you, Eliza ? "

" Would another man ask that ? "

Deb was on a false trail, her manner hectic and unnatural, her senses over-stimulated. But, knowing all this, she dragged her reluctance to the gap in the last barrier—plunged through —bent her mouth to his up-turned, sleepy face——

And suddenly she remembered little Lothar von Relling . . . and pleaded to whatever Justice might be presiding somewhere, that she had been generous then, had given ardently for a boy's pleasure. . . . Would Justice please choose this moment to reward her ?

. . . His fingers slowly loosened grip of her hair ; it dropped heavily against his shoulders. And in swift reaction at seeing it there, Deb flung back her head, stood upright, pale and ashamed, . . . over his head their eyes met in the mirror which topped the fireplace in front of them. Reaction . . . she had had enough of this cramped, stuffy room, and all their cramped, stuffy passions ; stupefaction of everyone's moral sense ; a sort of frowsiness ; smoke and shut windows, and unaired emotions. . . . She wanted, at once and instantly,

a wind blown in with the running tide ; sanity and humour and keenness. Oh, anything but this room, at this moment, and the necessity of meeting the mirrored gaze of a man to whom she had just given herself away.

. . . The moment stretched, an interminable grey length. Then the music next door trickled away to silence, and it seemed as though the unsupported moment would have to trickle away with it. . . .

" I'm only human ! "—thus to himself the soldier stifled a protesting loyalty. Heavily he shifted round in his chair towards the girl, standing now so stiffly and primly erect behind him——

" Deb " . . .

A rap at the door. The evening had been punctuated by such staccato interruptions. This time it was Aunt Stella.

" Is Major Ames here ? Yes ? You're wanted on the 'phone ; trunk call, the page said. They came to look for you next door. Well, how's the patient ? " as Jenny emerged wanly from the clutch of La Ilorraine's overpowering personality. " My dear child, surely you would be better inside your own bed than outside someone else's. Off with you ! Make your husband attend to the hot-water bottle . . . fill it with his burning tears, if he likes. Deb, being your prying spinster aunt, it is my duty to inform you that this room has a horribly dissipated smell of fish and stove-oil and smoke, and one doesn't put one's hair down for the evening till all the visitors have left ; I ought to fetch your grandpapa—only he'd have a stroke. Madame, Miss Verity threatens to go already, and wants to say good-bye."

III

Burton Ames, as he lumbered downstairs, was angry with himself for being angry at the interruption. It was much better ; if he once budged from his safe resolve, the Chorus would become quite impossible. And he would miss it—would miss them—quite intensely. They had obviously set out to try him pretty severely this evening. Why ? Sheer mischief ? Deb was the more dangerous of the two. One could feel tenderly, an absurd, almost pathetic tenderness, for Jenny

out-of-bounds . . . passionate, ill-used little urchin. But Deb . . . *Damn* this 'phone call!

"Hello!" . . .

IV

Deb and Jenny were alone.

"Deb—I saw."

"Saw what?" said Deb absently.

"When you bent his head back . . . just now. And then Mad'm came between. Deb—*did* he?"

Deb did not answer. Sitting on the edge of the bed, hands clasped round her knees, ears straining, straining for his returning tread, she examined her behaviour of a moment ago, and decided that self-verdict must wait on subsequent events. If only he made it worth while. . . .

The room had grown unaccountably darker. Jenny shuddered; propped herself up on one elbow:

"Deb, old girl, it's a fool's game to pretend one is ill when one isn't, because——"

"There he is!" burst from Deb's lips, oblivious of Jenny.

Burton Ames swung into the room, rejuvenated.

"Jenny—Deb—I'm off to-night."

His voice was still quiet and controlled; but the weary inflexion to which they were accustomed from him had been replaced by tense virility; his bent shoulders were squarely flung back; his eyes snapped and tingled like bright blue fire under the grizzled jutting eyebrows.

"I'm off to-night."

"She . . . your wife . . . she wants you again," Jenny gasped.

"Yes. I spoke to her on the 'phone. She has taken a house in London; Campden Hill; just moved in. I'm joining her at once; she has invited me," with a quick, whimsical smile. "I wish it hadn't occurred to you to be 'taken ill' just to-night, Jenny dear; you could have helped me pack. Deb's disqualified, of course; good little girls mayn't pass the ogre's threshold, according to Mother's-Knee. Never mind, I'll send my orderly down in the morning; can't wait now. I say, look at Cora!"

Simultaneously the three turned and stared at the altar of their union; the line of flame was slowly narrowing, and the

walls and ceiling and furniture, and the faces of the three grouped round and on the bed, hitherto sharply defined in black and white, were already smudged to a mere dimness.

"Cheap irony—oh, very inexpensive indeed!" scoffed Deb. And she was grateful to Cora . . . deeply grateful.

"On the contrary, a histrionic sense of the fitness of things. When did you last fill the oil-tank, Deb?"

"Before dinner—no, though, I didn't—I remember now, Jenny came in and distracted me. That explains it."

Nevertheless, the gradual ebbing of the light, coincident with the silence succeeding the waves of noise and music next door, wrought eerily upon the nerves of the two of the Chorus who had not received their call of "all's right with the world."

Even Ames was touched to a cheery sentimentality: "I shall miss you both tremendously; you've been so awfully good to me."

"Oh, I'm sure you've been very welcome," said Deb lightly. "You're in a hurry—don't let these obsequies delay you. We bury Jenny the day after to-morrow, at two o'clock, if you care to attend."

"As I was responsible for her death-bed scene, I suppose I must. But it's been worth it, hasn't it, Jenny beloved, to have had this last fling together?"

Jenny played up. "Oh, it has! it has! I've lived my life down to the very dregs! And now, as the light slowly fades——"

"And the music dies away——" supplemented Deb.

"And the asparagi have been trickled one by one down that dark and narrow path that engorges all asparagi——"

"So that young life, too, throbbed to silence. Whistling, he went on his way, and never knew till afterwards——"

"I can't whistle," the soldier interrupted Deb. "But I'll do all the rest of the stunts. Good-bye, Jenny, my darling; I've been a fearful rotter . . ." his voice broke in mock pathos. Secretly he was rather glad of this burlesque which covered any necessity for real pathos; because he was so happy, he just could not pretend otherwise.

"I'm—not—in—pain!" gasped Jenny. "See—I'm smiling . . . quite a beautiful smile, isn't it? Perhaps I shall be well . . . to-morrow. No, I shan't!" she screamed. "No to-morrow for me. Soldier . . . don't—don't go. . . . Wait till . . . I . . ."

"Sweetheart, I can't; you might be ever so long about it, and I really must be off. Good-bye, Jenny; good-bye, Deb"; he lingered a moment still, though it was evident that every nerve in him was chafing at the delay. "You've both been so awfully decent to me," he repeated, sincerely this time. And he kissed first Jenny and then Deb, in boyish, spontaneous gratitude.

So they gained, quite without effort, what they had set out to gain, that evening.

"Good-bye!" the door slammed behind him in sheer exuberance of high spirits. Then repetition of the same business with his bedroom door. Then silence. And the room a black pall now, with just a last faint quaver of light—suddenly quenched.

It was unnecessary, Deb reflected, that he should have shown himself to them in this new splendour of recovered buoyancy. . . . It was bad enough before. . . . Her fancy, feverishly active, followed his taxi along the streets, followed him up the steps and past the front door of the house in Campden Hill—into the room where a woman waited——

Fancy was jerked to a standstill here; he would utter her name; what was it?—Cicely?—Irene?—Eleanor? . . . Yes, she could hear his voice speaking any of these . . . very low and taut . . . "Eleanor" . . .

Then of course he would kiss her. Well. . . .

And for the girl who sat on the edge of the bed, the knowledge of having made—rather an exhibition of herself. It did not help much that he seemed to have forgotten the incident. The main thing was that she remembered it. Would always remember it.

She thought she heard a little sigh from the bed. Jenny! . . . quick and warm came to Deb realisation of the blessed solace of a companion in suffering. Jenny would just understand, as she never failed to understand the simple everyday things such as hunger and pain and the loss of love. Jenny would heal her with that wonderful touch of hand and cheek that was like balm. . . . Deb felt shivery and childish and desolate. . . . She laid her head down on Jenny's breast, and lay for several moments quite still, waiting for comfort to steal into her. She was glad that Jenny did not attempt to talk about what had happened.

Suddenly Deb started away, wildly frightened. Why—Jenny's heart was not beating. . . .

CHAPTER VI

I

RICHARD found his Easter holidays dull. Montagu Hall was not a satisfactory substitute for Daisybanks, where he had owned his own carpentering shed in the garden, in which he might rampage as he pleased. Ferdie had been an understanding father in supplying Richard and Deb with full facilities to rag and to rampage. Now Richard passed most of his time reading books that dealt with the practical side of the war, and keeping fit in preparation for when he was eighteen. Perhaps he could squeeze himself in next year already by misstating his age . . . there was always the dreadful possibility that the war might suddenly come to an end, and leave him what it had found him, a Winborough fifth form boy.

He was glad when the last week of the holidays came round ; Deb was always about with some girl—Antonia Verity ; and most of his chums being older than himself, were scattered about the country in training, or else in the trenches. David Rothenburg, of course, was about the same age ; but Rothenburg was a moony sort of chap, especially lately. More from boredom than affection, Richard spent an afternoon at Bertie Fraser's home in the south-west of London. The news of the torpedoing of the Lusitania had come through a couple of days before ; and the two boys vented some of their hot indignation by experiments with a model submarine which should " damn well teach the blackguards not to mess about with our passenger liners ! "

" I'll put you on your way," Fraser volunteered, when Richard had to go.

They turned from the quiet street of houses into a mews ; then through a slum displaying barrows with highly-coloured wares, gaudy with small shops gustily illuminated, raucous with slatternly women calling from the upper windows to their offspring in the gutters.

"Short cut to the trams," explained Fraser. "Hullo, what's the row?"

A woman was huddled on a doorstep, wailing loudly, openly, without any pretence of hiding her stark grief. Her wisps of grey hair were blown by the wind flat across her distorted face, which she neither burrowed in her arms nor covered with a handkerchief. For she had just received tidings that her daughter had gone down in the steerage of the Lusitania, and she wanted God and man to know it.

A knot of sympathizers, neighbours and casual passers-by, stood dumbly around her, listening to the saga of Ethel Ann's childhood, and Ethel Ann's adolescence, and Ethel Ann envisioned powerfully but crudely as a human livid face, struggling, gulping, pleading for help . . . help refused. . . . "They pushed 'em back into the water!" screamed the old crone. "My little 'un. Curse the Germans!—Curse 'em! They watched 'er drowning, and they laughed. A-a-aaah . . ." articulation trailed away into a long-drawn-out cry of rage and mourning and hate. She strained her skinny arms in a tight line upward, as though in one gesture could be uttered all that her tongue had failed to say.

Richard felt it was impossible just to stand still and look on at this. He glowered about him in a spirit of desperate truculence. The others of the group were in exactly the same case, their eyes roaming stupidly up and down the narrow street, as though in search of some immediate measures. A carter leaning against his dray drawn up to the kerb opposite, spoke out fiercely:

"Ay. 'Uns. That's the sort they are. Wish I 'ad one or two under my fist now. I'd show 'em what for."

"You *have* got 'em under your fist now—plenty—if you know where to look!" A lantern-jawed man with the hollow eyes of a fanatic, sprang onto the tail-board of the dray. At once he formed a vortex for all the loose and aimless emotions adrift in that street. Richard and Fraser found themselves in a wedge of men and women, women predominating, swaying with that sort of concerted drunken rhythm peculiar to all crowds. Even the mother of the drowned girl stopped her wails, and stared fixedly at the demagogue.

"Germans everywhere in this country—millions of 'em, laughing up their sleeves because we're such ruddy softs as

not to chuck 'em out. Laughing now, I expect, over our women and children pushed back into the icy water ; *English* women and children. Yes, it's a good joke, ain't it ? First-class ! . . . I 'ad a pal on the Lusitania—well, never mind that—there's some 'ere as 'ad more than pals. Are we going to stand it—that's what I want to know ? Are we going on trading with murderers and cowards, living cheek by jowl with 'em, buying our very bread from 'em . . . *poisoned* bread ! I tell you, there are Germans in the next street, in this street, and in a thousand other streets in England, with their dirty names over the shop-windows. Ask the Government !—ah ! the Government'll do something about it, per'aps, by and by. Ask 'em —they'll say they've took the proper measures of precaution. We don't want precaution, thank yer all the same. We want revenge on the foul scum what sank the Lusitania ! We want revenge—not by and by, but *now* ! We want revenge—and by the dying agonies of our children, and for the sake of those they've left, we'll have it ! "

His hearers had been like empty bottles offering no resistance to the fiery liquid he poured into them. Yes—they wanted instant revenge ; that was what they had sought by their vacant stares. With a scattered howl, from which the human element seemed long since to have been drained, they swirled up the street. Richard was borne along by the impetus of their fury. He had lost sight of Fraser, who, missing him, had probably returned home ; it did not matter ; this was rather a lark—one of the Lusitania riots ; they had been breaking out all over London since the news had come through. No—not exactly a lark. . . . it swelled into something more formidable and animated by a spirit of deeper satisfaction than warranted by the schoolboy description : this was action ; this was war ; he was in direct contact with it at last. A gang of men in an ugly temper, running in a set direction . . . he could feel purpose behind the lurching, staggering passage of the mob. . . . They were on their way to punish the Germans—coarse hulking giants who could laugh at Ethel Ann's drenched face helpless in a green tumble of breakers. . . . Brutes ! damned brutes ! we'll show them ! . . .

This was all the jerky elated comment his brain could register during the headlong stampede up the cramped alley ; that—and a confused impression of the women's faces here and there patching the rest : streaming hair, with the iron pins still

clumsily caught in it ; mouths open and awry ; damp red skins. Mob-women—they were hideous. . . .

The lantern-jawed man, still leader, halted abruptly in front of a small baker's shop. " What about that ? " denunciatory forefinger thrown out to indicate the name painted over the window : Gottlieb Schnabel. The crowd replied by another exultant howl . . . it was beginning to merge its separate identities into the Demos-beast, at once frightful yet silly ; incapable alike of retreat or initiative ; a beast that uttered meaningless sounds ; could be deflected hither and thither ; a beast without logic or coherence ; but a beast that was out, very obstinately, to maul somebody . . . the Germans. . . .

" What about that ? "

Those in the van swerved so sharply into the little doorway of the shop, that their comrades immediately behind them could not restrain themselves from reeling past it by weight of impetus ; then turned, and pressed back, with a violent impact jamming the rearmost in the narrow aperture ; so that it seemed that dark menacing figures were springing out of the shadows from all sides and directions, into the pallid flare of the gas-jets singing forlornly over the counter.

The shop was deserted. Violent hands ripped down the curtains that divided off the back-parlour, and about a dozen roughs hurled themselves up the stairs, chanting : " Schnabel : Schnabel ! " in hideous sing-song. Their feet could be heard trampling the upper premises in search of the owner : " Come aht of it, yer bloody funk ! Wot abaht the Lusitania ? " . . . The shop-door swung backwards and forwards in the draughts of wind which blew down the street ; and at each oscillation, a little bell tinkled the warning of customers—an innocent tinkle, like a distant sheep-bell . . . inadequate tinkle that recurred thinly through all the chaos of heavier sound : Crash of splintered glass, as the scales and weights were sent flying through the front window of the shop. The majority of avengers were working off their blood-lust by hullabaloo and wreckage ; tossing about the buns and cakes ; swinging and smashing the rows of big sweet-bottles ; sending a hurricane of piled-up bread-baskets over the floor. It had been a neat little interior, three minutes before . . . !

But Richard was impatient of all this mere monkey destruction; his imagination was a-sweat to vent itself upon Germans, not upon rolls and doughnuts. He raced up the back stairs—and down again; no Germans there; and the rioters engaged in the same stupid business of destruction. But the Germans . . . pointed steel helmets, puffed-out cheeks, and thick sensual lips—where had they contrived to stow themselves away? The notion had got started that they were here . . . somewhere . . . the excited boy did not stop to reason it out. He wanted to batter with his fists against a fat resisting carcase. Here?—of course they were; somebody had said so. Dodging the volley of loaves, he bolted out of the shop, and round the corner to the tiny yard at the back, unheeding whether he were alone or followed. The bakehouse! —must be one under the shop. Yes—beneath this wooden flap. Guided by the hot good smell of bread in the oven, he wrenched at the hinges; and rashly taking the ladder for granted, plunged into the gaping black space. Fragments of tales relating to the Lusitania horrors were flying loosely about in his mind, like the loaves in the shop: sickening details gasped out by the dazed survivors, and written up for the public in lurid journalese. Fighting—was that the Hun idea of fighting?—swine! cheats! butchers!—his turn to show them now. . . .

Richard bumped his feet on level ground; he blinked an instant in the red dimness of his surroundings. . . then, gradually, a face swam into his consciousness—a face over there, by the barrels—a face smeared in flour, and channelled by the drip of perspiration—a face that would have been ludicrous, were it not for its expression of deadly shivering fear . . . *trapped* fear. . . .

With knowledge of utter helplessness in his fascinated gaze, he confronted Richard. Beside him, a plump woman and two or three children crouched in a shadowy lump.

No army of Germans here. Only the little baker, Gottlieb Schnabel, and his family.

He stared at Richard. Richard stared back. And then his swollen illusion was pricked and shrivelled. So this was the reality of what he had been vengefully hounding down, he and the bawlers overhead? this one peaked, unhappy little face, white with dabs of flour, white in the last dumb extremity of panic.

Schnabel's dry lips moved convulsively. . . . "Ach, bitte," he babbled; then, with an effort: "Can—I—help—for—it?" . . .

Richard just caught the words. He recoiled; turned and stumbled up the ladder. . . . One must get away from that face. . . . Not so easy—some of the crowd had followed him after all, were swarming round the entrance to the bakehouse. "There's no-one there," muttered Richard; "no-one there" . . . his voice was choked as though in a thick fog. "No-one there——" But the main thing was to get out, into the street, before they began to do things—no, that did not matter,—but before he could *hear* them doing things. They were pressing him back again, down again. . . . "There's no one there, I tell you!" Blindly he buffeted right and left the heads which blocked his passage. Some of them, believing him, gave way . . . melted out of reach from his hard fists and powerful driving shoulders. Others went shuffling and clattering past him, down the wooden rungs. "Schnabel! Schnabel!"—and a sharp scream. One must get away, quickly. . . .

A great surge of bodies in the yard. Thrusting forward, with his head low down, through a rank smell of boots and corduroys and rusty skirts, Richard got clear at last. Round the corner—into the street—a number of people running in his direction—three or four policemen. "There's no-one there!"—half-sobbing, he dodged through a mews into a wider street; again that loud trample of feet beating towards him—would they never let him escape? he wanted to be free of mobs. What did this mob want? Schnabel? . . . No, it was only a helter-skelter of gnome-like urchins, shrieking hoarsely their late editions. He paused to draw breath; leant up against an adjacent wall; his cap had gone long ago, and the wind blew in hard, fresh gusts through his hair.

Presently he walked on again, slowly. Hysteria had evaporated, and was replaced by the usual shame. Now he came to think over the matter coolly, what had so upset him? The little rat of a baker had been in a funk, certainly; probably justified; probably the rabble had handled him fairly roughly. What of that? Ethel Ann, equally innocent, equally helpless, had met with an infinitely worse fate.

Oh, he was not going to take part in the baiting himself. No sport in it. The wisest course to pursue had been to depart

from the scene, as he had done. Had he "departed from the scene" or made an exit—rather less dignified than that inferred? Well, he could hardly be expected to stay and look on. Nor could he have protected Schnabel—hang it! the man *was* a German. Not "the Germans"—but still a German. Richard, impatiently, classified the whole experience as "quite a decent scrum"; and as such, stuck it up on a shelf in his memory, like a book with several pages safely gummed together. He proved to be in a completely strange neighbourhood; and devoted all his present faculties in discovering the whereabouts of Montagu Hall.

II

"Richard, is that you?"

"Yes, Pater; I've just come in."

"I want to speak to you, my boy."

"Right-o!" Richard turned on the stairs, interrogatively.

"Not here. In my room."

Old Hermann Marcus looked up with a queer gleam in his eyes, as Richard and Ferdie entered. Almost as though he were sorry for the boy—and yet secretly and maliciously triumphant.

"How are you getting on at Winborough?" Ferdinand asked jerkily, after a pause.

"Same as usual: excellent all-round ability, but no outstanding merit, as old Skeffington says. I say, dad, would you have any objection if I joined up next year already?" since his father had seemingly nothing of any importance to impart, Richard thought he might as well use the formal interview for his own purpose.

"Joined up what?"

"The army, of course. Royal Flying Corps, for choice; I'm fit enough to stand the medical test. And lots of fellows are passing themselves off as older than their age. Only I'm not very tall . . ." his tone implied reproach for his father's lack of inches. There was silence for a moment; he felt the two men were not attending to his request as they should; so he went on in further explanation: "It's so rotten to be just under age for enlisting. Different if you're a kid, and out of it altogether. Rogers—you remember him? he was head

boy at Winborough—Rogers is only eighteen months older than I am, and he's in the thick of it. And to-day more than ever——" he stopped dead.

"Why to-day more than ever?" Ferdinand enquired, very gently.

Richard was not quite sure why: except that to-day he had expended a lot of heat and energy on a cause which had repaid him neither in vigorous defence nor in ultimate satisfaction; and he wanted an experience of real, substantial war and real, substantial Germans to make up for the futile civilian imitation. But he was unwilling to explain all this about Germans in front of his grandfather, or even to his father, who might be subject to occasional sensitive twinges on that score. So he swerved from the direct question:

"Quite frankly, dad, I mean to enlist next year, with or without permission. But I thought I'd like to hear if you have any special objection; good of me, isn't it?" laughing.

"Certainly I should be proud and glad if you could fight for England, but——" Ferdie evidently found an increasing difficulty in going on. He took up an evening paper from the table: "Have you seen the late editions, Richard?"

"No. Any news? Not—not a defeat?"

"The Prime Minister has made certain promises . . . there have been more anti-German riots over this Lusitania business——"

"Conceited fools, who haven't the brains to win a victory at the Front, think themselves patriots if they break a few shop-windows," growled Marcus from his corner.

Richard flushed darkly, and his hands clenched in his pockets: "They'd be doing the same, and much worse, to us in Germany, if we'd established ourselves all over the place there, as they have here. And the sinking of the Lusitania was a foul, cowardly affair; no wonder we've lost control of our tempers, hearing about it."

"*We?*" echoed the old Bavarian, with a sarcastic inflexion; "and you as German as I, my boy! You won't be allowed to forget it as easily, in the future."

"Rubbish!" said Richard shortly. He had no desire to quarrel with his grandfather, who, as a lonely but unyielding unit in enemy country, demanded a certain chivalry of treatment.—But no fellow was going to stand being called a German, nowadays! "Have you done with me, dad? I'm

sorry about the fuss in the papers, but it will all blow off presently. I don't think they'll do anything to the naturalized Germans, anyway; not to those who have been settled in England as long as you." He sauntered towards the door; then halted to add in a sudden inspiration of diplomacy: "The sooner I'm fighting, dad, the better for you, all of you. A son in the army makes a huge difference to public feeling."

"That depends on which army . . ." threw in Hermann Marcus. And Ferdie said, with a stupendous effort: "You can't fight for England in this war, Richard. I'm sorry, as you are so dead nuts on it," carefully negotiating the idiom. "But they will not take you. You are a German."

Richard burst into a great shout of laughter. "What rot, dad! How can I be a German? I'm as English as they make 'em."

"You were born in Germany. And I was not naturalized at that date."

"Born—in—Germany?"

"You see," Ferdie apologized, miserably avoiding his son's eyes, "your grandfather invited us to pay him a long visit to Munich. I and Deb—and your dear mother, of course. He had never seen little Deb . . . she was seven years old——"

"A quite abominable pest of a child!" from the depths of the armchair in the corner.

"And so we all went over. And you were born there. Your poor mother died of it . . ." he cleared his throat, and blew his nose. "That, perhaps, is why it was never mentioned to you."

Ferdie was right. He had felt the loss of Dorothea so keenly that sentiment demanded of the household that her death should never be alluded to. Whence followed that Richard's birth was likewise hushed up, being intimately linked with the bereavement and all its tragic circumstances. He had never bothered about the matter, taking it for granted that, like Deb, he was born at Daisybanks.

"But, father, I can't be a German. I—I don't *like* Germans. I can't stick them at any price." His tone was sharp with the first agonized belief that some truth might lurk in the altogether staggering accusation that these two were bringing against him. "I don't like Germans. And we're fighting them. I'm English—like other chaps. You can't make a fellow German by saying he is," relieved commonsense assert-

ing itself over a frame of mind which was almost babyish in its reliance on the repetition : " I don't *like* Germans ! "

And then, a criminal before the sternest of judges, Ferdinand Marcus made his confession :

" You see—when I was naturalized afterwards, you—you were not naturalized at the same time. I wanted you to choose for yourself when you came of age ; to be free to make your own choice for one country or another—for any country. I, as a boy, had never been consulted what were my private wishes——" His father here gave utterance to a grunt pregnant with rich opinions of the unimportance of Ferdie's wishes, whatever they might have been. " —It should be different for you, I said. Who knows if you would want to find yourself a British subject, in twenty-one years ? Time enough then. So I left it till you should be old enough——"

" It didn't strike you, I suppose, that a war might break out in the meantime ? "

" It did not strike a great many other people, Richard."

" Doch ! everyone but an idiot ; an idiot and a bungler . . . with your prate of 'my children's rights,' and 'my children's opinions' and 'my children's liberty.' . . . A bungler with your children, like with everything else, you are bringing one of them to an internment camp ; we will see to what fine end you bring the other."

Richard faced round sharply : " Is that what it means for me ? "

" We cannot tell for certain ; I will make an appeal on your behalf——"

" Damn ! I don't want any appeals. It's not a felony to be born in one place instead of another. What's the law ? "

" By pre-war law, you took your father's nationality while you were a minor—but all that has been altered——" Ferdinand took up the paper : " They've been lenient so far ; but all this agitation—the Home Secretary has had to make concessions to the public. They are rounding up enemy aliens of military age ; that does not concern you at present. You will have to register under the Five-Mile Act until—until——"

" Until I'm old enough to have enlisted," muttered the boy. " And Deb ? "

" Deb is all right ; she was born in England. At least—I must see : there is still some confusion under these new con-

ditions as to whether you are what your father is, or where you were born. And they alter the law every five minutes. But I think she is all right."

"Good," with a breath of relief. "And you, dad?"

"They are not persecuting the naturalized, so far. There is an outcry from the extreme party, but——" Ferdie shrugged his shoulders, "I am a British subject."

"And grandfather? And Aunt Stella?"

"They are repatriating the old people and the women and children. But exemptions are to be made in special cases; Stella has been a resident here for so many years——"

"And I, being a cripple of nearly eighty, your English may have the kindness to allow me to die under a flag which I have certainly no wish to live under."

"Cut all that!" his grandson silenced him roughly. "It's rank pro-German——"

"German," Hermann methodically corrected him. "*I* at least know what I am."

"And Richard and I also know what we are, too," Ferdie shouted warmly, clapping his hand on Richard's broad, and at that moment exceedingly forbidding shoulder; "our sentiments for this country of ours are loyal as any Britishers'; we cheer their victories. We continue to salute the Union Jack with pride in our hearts——"

"Whatever such foolishness you may commit, liebe Ferdinand, you remain only half an Englishman."

Ferdie's resolute bellow gained strength with every caustic interrruption from his parent. "We will cheerfully give help where we are permitted——"

Richard broke in: "—And cheerfully let ourselves be hoofed out where we're not? No, I'm not going to hang round the edges of patriotism like a beggar. Why wasn't I told of all this till now?"

It struck Ferdie that Richard was at times disconcertingly like his grandfather. "Why should you have been made worried and uncomfortable at school, while there was still no need? And before the war, what did it matter where you were born?"

"And now, what else matters in all the world?" the first numbness of shock had passed, and Richard's innermost being was plunging in every direction like a tortured bull caught inside the ring-fence. "You've robbed me of my nationality

—professing to be so keen on my happiness. Born in Germany, and lugged over to England; educated in England, and allowed to take it for granted I was English, and all the while a German subject—in God's name, where do I belong? what am I? who can claim me? Oh yes, you've been jolly good to me, I don't deny that; you've spoilt me; you've given me everything—except a country. But to shove a fellow in a position where an outbreak of war leaves him with his sentiments in one place, and his birth-certificate in another, is rather overdoing the freedom-of-choice stunt. You might have known all along I'd care to be rooted somewhere. Citizenship doesn't go for nothing, even in peace——"

"Nonsense, Richard; be honest; how much did you trouble your head about citizenship, before nineteen-fourteen?"

"I thought I was English," Richard said. And repeated, with a sort of dazed pugnacious idiocy: "I thought I was English." Then he flared out again: "*You* didn't think at all. You were just careless. Why on earth did you want to take me to Germany to be born?"

"I have told you; your grandfather sent for us."

"It wouldn't have hurt him to wait a year or two. Much he cared if he never saw any of you again. You were all afraid to say no to him. I thought myself so lucky to be born in these times. What's the good of the war now?"

His father could not forbear from a smile at the savage young egoism. The boy saw it, and raged on: "It would have been better if I'd died when my mother died——"

"Hush, hush, my son."

. . . Richard crashed his weight on to a chair, head butted down on his arms along the back rail. And the two men watched him in silence; one of them thinking with a slow, grudging, resentment how good a moment it might have been for him to have seen this youngster in an officer's light-blue uniform, come clanging and jangling into a certain house in Munich, to bid good-bye before his departure to win glory for the Vaterland. And the other was vainly groping round for what comfort he could give his only son in trouble; Dorothea would have so known what little tender thing to do or say . . . his eyes filled with tears, and in his over-anxious endeavour to play mother at this juncture, he blundered dismally:

"Come, come, my boy—buck up! You who are usually so sensible. It isn't such a tragedy, even if it should end,

at the worst, by internment. You will be safe, and with friends——"

Richard slowly lifted his head. He looked rather old for sixteen, and his voice dragged like tired footsteps on a heavy road :

" Sorry if I was rude, dad. Yes, of course I'll be safe. Much safer than in the Flying Corps. I didn't think of that. I'm going to bed now. Good-night."

Half-way across the room, he came back for the evening paper. Then he went out.

III

. . . Strange that his brain should have shot right away from the main catastrophe on to this tangent question of reprisals ! There, out in mid-ocean, a liner sunk ; here, in a London slum, a baker's shop raided. Where was the connection ? A Gottlieb for an Ethel Ann. . . . " Yes, but is it quite fair—revenge by proxy ? it wasn't Schnabel who drowned Ethel Ann ; it was another German ; Schnabel was all the while harmlessly selling loaves. Why should he have to pay ? " Were they thinking of that, the mad herd who had rushed up the street, brandishing their crowbars and axes and pokers ? " Was I thinking of it ? To relieve one's feelings . . . biting on the tooth—yes, but it's got to be that especial nervous tooth—and you should want to hit the *same* German, not any old German, or the next-best German. If Ethel Ann's mother could have got in on one of the torpedo crew . . . I suppose one can't expect a crowd to reason that way. But I might have saved him. . . . Damn it, why should I ? he's a German ! "

And so am I—and so am I—knocked the meaningless hammer refrain from the walls and ceiling of his room, from every corner and cranny ; in the wind that fitfully rattled the blind ; in the creak of the chair ; and from the rumble of traffic far below. . . . So am I—so am I—everywhere but inside his brain, where the mere statement might have been quickened to torturing realization—but it seemed unable to force an entrance, pushed out by a fantastic jumble of oddments he had never thought out before, never bothered to think out.

—Naturalized . . . what exactly did that stand for? A paper which was given in payment of some small sum, stating that you were no more of one nationality, but of another. . . . But surely nationality was no surface matter, to be dealt with in this arbitrary fashion? it went deeper: your own country, your own soil. "'Breathes there a man with soul so dead!' how Fraser ranted that, last term when they were doing Scott. Beastly showing-off! . . . What will they say at Winborough when I tell them?—No, hang! that wasn't it. . . . Nationality—the place where you were born——"

A dead halt in the onrush of thought. Richard stared blankly around him. . . . Then it began again, mental machinery that whirled ever faster, grinding, minutely grinding, at all that stray lumpy stuff. . . .

"Nothing to do with where you were born. I can swear to that. That's accidental. And your father's nationality—accidental too, as far as you're concerned; can't be tacked on to it as a matter of course.

"What is it, then? The land that holds a meaning for you; it might be a question of habitation, or tradition, or convenience—herd instinct with the people you live among. Or—or imagination.

"No—it digs further down than that even.

"It ought to be the sum of where you were born, and where your father was born as well, and his father; where you have always lived, and always hope to live."

But people move about. Cross over. Get mixed. You cannot actually fasten down humanity as neatly as on a map; a line here, and a line there, and this side is English, and this side German. During all these years of peace, little separate individuals busily and happily intermarrying and begetting children; becoming entangled in trade and in friendship; by a million amenities of commerce and art and amusement and family, semi-obliterating the sharp boundary outlines——

"People drift about. And then a war happens. Like a ripping of canvas. No—like two lines of trenches. . . . A scramble apart to either trench—lucky beggars who know quite distinctly where they belong. And No Man's Land between. And some stranded in No Man's Land. . . .

"To be officially of No Man's Land—that's one thing; can't be helped; penalty of carelessness beforehand. But is

it possible, I wonder, to *feel* yourself not for one country nor another? neither mattering? neither victory mattering?

"Socialism—international socialism. But then one must care principally for all humanity—in a lump. And that's patriotism too, on the largest scale of all. Just like a man crazy only on his own duck-pond is a patriot—a local patriot. All Man's Land . . . One Man's Land. . . .

"Not for me, thanks. If I had been twenty-one before all this shindy, I'd have been naturalized English!"

Naturalized! Was that only an official cover again? And under the covers, what were those people actually thinking? The Rothenburgs? thousands like them—the half-and-half people. . . .

"I like a German to *be* a German!" . . . "Naturalized or unnaturalized, it's all the same to me!" . . . "Can a leopard change his spots?" . . .

Memory offered him these stray phrases perpetually uttered and repeated in a penetrating rasp—where? . . . in the hall downstairs, and at—at breakfast, surely? (memory struggled) —Oh yes! old Gryce. Behind the voice a crude pink face materialized, with an ugly sag of line at the corners of the mouth and a wisp of white beard wagging from the chin. Old Gryce was always ejecting that type of remark.

"Intern them all! . . . We didn't ask them to settle over here. We don't want them. . . ."

The boy paced up and down the room, head bent, hands locked behind him, brows heavily knit, thinking it out:

Naturalization was, after all, a promise—well, a bargain then; what was a bargain but a mutual promise? A whole community had learnt to rely securely on such a promise; had confidently forfeited the protection and advantages of their native land, in favour of an adopted country. And now if their security were repudiated on excuse of war——

"Is there any stipulating clause in the naturalization contract, making it void in the event of war, I wonder? Because if not——

"But we can't leave enemy blood loose about the country during war-time. It isn't safe. They might all be spies. Some of them *are*. And spying is the worst thing of all—abuse of hospitality. No wonder the thought of it drives people to a sort of madness——"

He took up the evening edition—flung it down again; too

dark to read anything but the headlines : " More Anti-German Riots "——

. . . Someone crouching low in the corner by the cupboard. A patch of white. A face—mad-frightened. . . . " Ach, bitte——" . . . The little German baker.—Or . . . no—the face had changed—it was Richard himself, staring panic-stricken, yet reproachfully, at that other Richard who was leading against him a hostile mob :

" He's a German ! "

" And so am I—and so am I——"

It had stabbed through to the brain at last.

" I'm not a German. It's a lie. I'm not. I *hate* the Germans. They have drowned Ethel Ann . . . Ethel Ann . . . "

How had she looked ? had she brown or fair hair ?—but all hair is the same in the water . . . dank seaweed round a discoloured pulp. . . .

" Swine ! Swine ! "—he was pacing again with rapid, demented step. " That's not the game as it should be played, as it was arranged to be played. It's a breach of the rules. Women and children and non-combatants excluded, and every man with a chance of self-defence. The conventions of war——"

And suddenly Richard stood still and began to laugh. And what chance of defence had a man standing beside a bursting bomb thrown by an unseen hand from fifty yards away ? Little silly, fretful rules—with death and destruction and decay streaming wide over one country after another ; whirring in the very air above God's churches ; throbbing in the sea under the millionaire's pleasure-ship ; each individual helplessly involved with their bodies or with their goods or with their hearts. Then, what the devil is the use of some abstract gabble about the conventions of a game ? . . . All that was for five hundred years ago, when one soldier had it out with another soldier according to the laws of chivalry. But in *this* wholesale welter. . . . All that fuss about two or three isolated lives sacrificed against the rules, as compared to the thousands according to rule ; agony outside the rules, and agony according to rule. When it comes to it, what's the difference ? Ludicrous to reason in the old way—the ravings of an idiot ; we have ramped so far round in the circle of civilization that we are miles behind again. . . .

Richard did not attempt to turn his feverish, dishevelled reflections into coherence; but he could not force his mind from fastening with this queer new tenacity on aspects to which, until now, it had been muffled to a remote indifference. The war and all its immense and tendril complexities—how could he ever have viewed it just as a matter of dealing blows?

"It's because I was to have had an active part in it. I was going to join up. The only way to avoid war-horror is to take part in it. What will it look like from the internment camp?——"

Imagination pierced—and recoiled from the threatened nausea of stagnation. Internment . . . why, he and Deb had joked about it ("Yes, Deb's all right; I'm glad Deb's all right!")—Concentration camps; potted Germans—"Did you know, Richard, Gustav Fürth was potted yesterday?" . . . Jokes!—What were they like, these camps? the prisoners were well-treated, he had heard; but what did you *do*? . . . Vision of two fattish young Teutons sleepy over their game of dominoes. This for him, while out there, out there, was the scrum and the sacrifice. This for Richard, who was a fighter . . . "Oh God! let the war be over before I'm eighteen!"

PART II

CHAPTER I

"It was your pal I wanted really—not you," Antonia Verity informed Deb, when their friendship was sturdy enough to withstand such frankness, "I didn't like you."

"Jenny?—Yes, she was worth fifty of me."

"And yet you're not really humble," the other laughed. "Ring for tea, Deb. I'm tired of seeing you brooding like a sphinx. The pleasure grows monotonous. I suppose you can't brood while you eat macaroons?"

"Easily; they're quite dry and manageable."

"Tea, please, and a poached egg for Miss Marcus," Antonia commanded of the servant. "I can't help it if you don't want it, Deb—you must be cured of that inscrutable habit. I just can't bear it. How many men have called you Sphinx in your exotic career?"

"All, except one or two. It's very popular. So is Serpent of the Nile and Cleopatra and little Princess of Egypt. When I am moved to cry 'Yah, chestnut!' to these endearments, they offer to strangle me in my own hair."

"Which usually hangs down in readiness. You're the only person I've met outside fiction whose hair naturally gravitates towards your heels. Even on the night we first met——"

"Yes. The soldier and I had been fooling. . . . Antonia, you guessed, didn't you, that time—about Jenny?"

"I saw that she was really ill when I came into your room. And I was puzzled, because I had been quite sure before, that you and she were in some plot to escape from La Ilorraine. But I doubt if she knew herself, in that semi-hysterical condition, when sham ended and the real began. What did she actually die of?"

"Heart failure. She was weakened by a lot of 'flu, and aspirin, and operations, and nursing other people. I ought to have known the difference. But she was always wildly emotional, and almost as often in pain, and then that evening's

excitement——" Deb broke off. It was four months now since the night when Cora had lowered her flame in sympathy with the break-up of the Chorus. Four months—and Jenny dead was so *very* dead. . . . Her memory did not abide as lingeringly as in the case of a more spiritual or more intellectual personality. A warm quick reality of everyday little touches and eager practical services . . . these things die with the flesh. Deb just knew that neither Cora nor the room nor the soldier nor her own family had stood for home-always-on-the-tap on the second floor landing, as Jenny did. And the little group of people surrounding Jenny seemed mechanically to flop away in different directions, after that evening. Dolph took Bobby away to his people. La llorraine and Manon left Montagu Hall in a whirlwind of rage, because Mr Gryce had complained of Madame's breakfast costume ; the Turkish slippers seemed particularly to offend him. Of the Soldier no more had been heard. And even Deb's room in which it had all happened, was abandoned. " D'you mind if we share a double-room, Deb ? " Aunt Stella had asked rather anxiously, about a month later. " Now that Richard is coming back for the Easter holidays and will want a den of his own, I suggested it might be a saving for your father if we don't scatter quite so much. But he says you must be asked first if you'll consent to sleep with a soured old maid," with that tinkling laugh that never sounded quite as mirthful as the spirit it accompanied.

Deb was quite glad of the change. The associations of her old bed were rather poignant. Stella could not bear the smell of Cora, who was henceforth packed away in a boxroom. And Deb began to wonder if all her life would be a succession of disjointed episodes, each with its full complement of cast and scenery, and each when it was over to be slipped as easily as a bead off a string. Daisybanks, in the careless life before the war: what was known as the " Portman Rooms set " of wealthy semi-artistic young Israelites—dances—the river—frequent companionship of Hedvig and Lenchen Rothenburg. That bead slipped. Dorzheim, and its marionette figures: Felix and Marianna Koch, Sigismund who looked like Jesus Christ, Ralph and Huldah van Sittart, Elly Ladenberg from Manchester, clearest of all, perhaps, the upturned face of Lothar von Relling . . . They existed now and performed their parts, hidden away behind a thick black curtain . . . what matter if it were never raised again. Then the Chorus. . . .

What next?

After a pause, Antonia Verity answered that question. Antonia, following up a whim, came to Montagu Hall to see Jenny. Not finding Jenny, she knocked at the door of Deb's former bedroom. Deb was just moving—that is to say she was sitting dreamily on an overturned drawer, in the midst of a scrum of her possessions, reading a mid-Victorian novel entitled "Anna Lee, Maiden, Wife and Mother."

"Come and listen to this," she bade Antonia without further greeting.

They became intimate over "Anna Lee."

In Antonia Verity, Deb recognized with mixed feelings the temperament she had always most coveted, most desired to find in herself. The natural Artemis, Artemis from no simpering prudery nor actual coldness of disposition—but that Artemis who instinctively runs from the pursuer; Artemis in love with her own chastity. Her eyes, changing from hazel to green, deepset in shadow and drooping at the corners, were at perpetual war with the pure scissored curves of her mouth. Deb was aware that Antonia could never deal in fragments where her love-affairs were concerned; and that she rather wondered at those who did. It seemed therefore a foregone conclusion to Deb, whose mind was prone to run on lines of fairy-tale justice, that life must hold for Antonia the eventual big thing; bank in which this guarded stored-up treasure would ultimately find safe deposit. It remained a miracle to her how Antonia managed not to fritter the treasure. She never saw that trifles simply did not happen to the other girl. Men . . . knew. They liked her peacefully, but some fundamental quality in her gave them their cue for decent behaviour as a matter of course. As a same matter of course, they embarked on amorous experiment with Deb; could not leave her alone. And this, though Deb longed for Antonia's secret to attract the better treatment; more than ever admired her ideal of a girl clad in a sort of symbolic moonwhite armour, now that it had become incarnate. Though she had been often to Antonia's studio, she had never yet succeeded in probing a certain aloofness in her friend. . . .

Jenny—and then Antonia. Jenny whom one touched . . . a fervent cosiness of friendship punctuated throughout by touch—it was impossible to conceive of friendship with Antonia thus emphasized. Antonia was good to look at

—delicate, clean lines—no mess; her mind clearly braced to all encounter, whether of laughter or argument. But it was unthinkable that one should touch Antonia, nor seek touch from her; Antonia guarded something . . . as yet inviolable.

"Who was the man in the room?" Antonia enquired suddenly, at work upon her portrait of Deb.

"Oh—he was—a—a man."

"Yes, I gathered that with the naked eye."

"Incredible, Holmes—it passes human understanding."

"It passes human understanding what that gentleman in shirt sleeves was doing, cooking asparagus in your room."

"No scandal about asparagus, I hope?"

"They reeked of it—that night."

Deb moved restlessly. "Don't be priggish, Antonia."

"It isn't priggishness. Oh, do understand that. It's—decency. Not towards other people, but towards one's self. I don't care about conventions. . . . Yes, I do—they prevent litter and disorder—and they can't really get deep enough to handicap the emotions. What I meant was that I don't care about opinion. *I* do as I like."

"Well then . . . So do I."

"No. A man in your bedroom for an hour or two, just to talk to . . . and then good-night—that's not doing as you like. He shouldn't have been there at all. Taking you and your room for granted. And your lips."

"He never kissed me," said Deb in a very low voice.

"I said he took your lips for granted—and the possibility of them. His decision is beside the point. Deb, how I wish you wouldn't!"

After a pause the other girl said, "I won't ask 'what?' because I suppose I know. . . . And I agree with you. We ought to save it all up for the one man——"

"No, no, no. That's merely commercial. To keep one's market value uncorrupted. . . . Manon Ilorraine's standards. Horrid little *ingénue*. She reckoned every look thrown to that poor begging man Carew as so much profitless waste of virgin stock."

"I must say, you took in rather a lot, that one hectic evening at Montagu Hall."

Antonia rushed on: "Not to save all up for the one man—

but . . . isn't maidenhood in itself rather a splendid thing? I wish that didn't sound so affected. This isn't the Suffrage standard. I don't hate the other sex—not a bit. I like them. But . . . just to be proud, and not slovenly."

"You think I'm slovenly?"

"I've never seen you for more than a minute in male company. But I fancy, if I had, I should have wanted to cry out every minute: 'don't—oh don't!'"

"As bad as that?" lightly Deb had to feign amusement, for her Artemis girl was flicking her well on the raw. She remembered how she had experienced just that desire to cry out "don't" when Jenny——

So she stood half-way between Antonia and Jenny. But Jenny had been married—and Antonia said "isn't maidenhood in itself rather a splendid thing?"

A chill white dawn faintly shot with gold . . . for Antonia? for herself and Antonia? But surely such divine hesitancy and glamour were for the girl of eighteen, seventeen, sixteen . . . wide eyes, intent on vision, tremulous childish lips, "no one shall kiss me until he comes. . . ." And the end of the legend was that he came, and kissed her—just before she was tired of waiting—at twenty, say; or twenty-one. That answered the riddle so easily for young Artemis. But if the legend missed its obvious conclusion? . . . She was now twenty-four, and Antonia twenty-six . . . Antonia's austere demands were rather a strain on passion unsatisfied in the late twenties—rather a strain on the chill-white-dawn ideal. Antonia at sixteen, tingling from hot indignant scorn at anything which ran counter to her unshaken, unshakeable schoolgirl principles of what was "right"—Antonia at sixteen, not unlike Deb at sixteen; dreaming in a walled garden of lilacs. They had outgrown it——

What now?

Some sort of a compromise . . . a dream semi-yielded, semi-cherished. . . . Oh, just chance it! A separate code of rules for every transient episode—or none at all—or trust to the moment's inspiration—take love haphazard—compromise. . . . Burton Ames had left her possessed by the very desperation of restlessness. And it was easier now to give lightly, since striving to compete with Jenny, she had once broken bounds. Jenny had died, without getting what she wanted; Jenny had shown how easy, how frighteningly easy, it was to die . . .

slip away. So cram in something at all costs, lest it should happen to you like that. . . .

"Here you are!" Antonia threw her the sketch on which she had the last half hour been working. It was a startlingly clever study in crayons. Underneath it was scrawled "Girl of the Transition Period."

Petulantly Deb flicked it away. "'It's pretty—but is it art?'" she quoted.

"No. It's psychology."

"Résumé of our conversation. And yet my people allow me to do what I please, say what I please, go where I please, with whom I please—they're awfully broad-minded."

"That's just why your career is so precarious, my wee one. You're up against nothing—except your own extremely hazy sense of self-respect. If your father and your Aunt Stella were saying 'don't' all the time, and locking you in your room, and forbidding men the house, and intercepting letters, and generally behaving as we've been taught the Best Parents ought to behave, you'd be kept busy defying them, which is a quite healthy occupation. At the worst, in a mood of superlative defiance, you'd go right over the wall . . . well, that's at least honest. All this laxness and let-her-do-as-she-likes, and 'I'm sure young men are to be trusted now-a-days' . . . But parents are not to be trusted. I don't know what parents are coming to. My mother—it's her sorrow that I haven't yet formed a Bold Free Union for her to countenance and encourage——"

"And you would never consent to do it; have no desire to do it. It's a sad waste of an indulgent parent, Antonia. Thousands of girls get cursed and kicked out of home for just that boldness and freeness which your mother pines to find in you."

"The darling!—it's only theoretical pining. Any vivid details of a Bold and Free Union would shock her beyond words. I suppose the truth is that parents are thinking too much—and not enough. It's still only surface lenience. They'd howl quite as loudly, and break their hearts quite as vehemently as the old-fashioned parent, if we really transgressed."

"Father would, of course, which puts it out of the question."

"You being financially dependent on him?"

"Not only that. I happen to be fond of him."

Antonia smiled, a sweet slow warmth and kindling of her

wonted frostiness. "Is there that much grace in you, woman?"

"Though you didn't allow for it in the sketch—yes, there is."

"I won't exhibit the sketch, I promise you."

"Antonia, dear——" Mrs Verity stood, with one hand pushing aside the dark blue and green portière of the studio. A neat little figure in a black dress with white collar and cuffs; a precise little spinster, one would say, from a novel of Jane Austen or Mrs Gaskell. Manners of superlative delicacy; speech in which each separate syllable was clearly articulated; a habit of mind which seized on the most trivial utterance of others, and smoothed it out flat for earnest consideration. Mrs Verity's personality was such as to make it quite credible that Antonia was found in a gooseberry bush.

"Good afternoon, Miss Marcus. Are you quite well? Yes? Really? I am so pleased. It is delightful to find you here with Antonia. I wonder if I might ask for a cup of tea? Not if it is at all inconvenient, Antonia. I can order it in the dining-room, indeed I can. Do you not think the parks are looking lovely? I wonder if—— But I interrupted you, Miss Marcus."

"Oh, it's nothing," said Deb, who had only begun an affirmative: "Yes, aren't they?" in reference to the parks.

"Oh, but please, please say what you were going to say. It was unpardonably rude of me to cut you so short."

"It wasn't anything worth repeating, Mrs Verity. Do go on with what you were going to say—'I wonder if——'"

"No, indeed, that can quite well wait till you say what you were going to say."

"But really—I've forgotten it," cried Deb, by now hysterically incapable of the "Yes, aren't they?" of her original intention.

"My fault; how could I——"

"Here's your tea, mother;" Antonia smiled mischievously down on the punctilious little lady's distress.

Deb stretched her limbs lazily, without displaying, however, much determination to move. She was rather hoping that Antonia would invite her to stay. But:

"I have to be going out presently, but in an opposite direction, or I'd ask you to wait for me."

"Are you supping with Gillian? I thought you told me you expected her here; Miss Marcus, do you not agree

with me that Gillian Sherwood is quite a remarkable character ? "

An almost imperceptible contraction of Antonia's brows expressed impatience. " What was the lecture like ? " she asked. Deb pondered on the unknown Gillian, hardly hearing Mrs Verity's painstaking description. This was one of the moments when she was convinced of mystery in the background of Antonia's life. Why had she never mentioned a Gillian who had a remarkable character, with whom she was on terms of supper ? Why did she apparently object so strongly to her mother's introduction of the name ? Why was she on certain occasions so anxious to rid herself of Deb's company ? Why was she so vague and elusive as to the manner in which she had spent the foregoing day, or intended to spend the morrow ? Why had she once said casually " Don't drop in here without letting me know, Deb. Always 'phone. I'm out such a lot, it's hardly worth your while to chance it. . . ." Antonia herself was always " chancing it " at Montagu Hall.

A second door in the studio led to a small garden. Beyond the panes a tall young man suddenly loomed, and rapped three times, as might a conspirator.

" It's Cliffe Kennedy," remarked Mrs Verity, and nodded cheerfully to him. Immediately, as though at some signal, he opened the door, strolled in, and immediately burst forth : " I've just told a man that his wife was an abominable female ! Yes, an abominable female ! and he didn't know whether to agree with me or not.—Antonia, one doesn't put tea away when a visitor comes. One brings it out.—I think people ought to know their own minds about that sort of thing, don't you, Mrs Verity ? "

Mrs Verity, as was her wont, gave the matter her weightiest consideration of puckered brow and clasped fingers. " It certainly seems to me of the utmost importance that a man should be aware of his exact state of harmony or disharmony towards the woman in whose company he is compelled to pass at least two-thirds of his normal existence," she pronounced. " But perhaps he hesitated to express his opinion to you in the fear that it might by some means be carried back to his wife ? "

" Not the slightest fear of that—she was *there*, my dear lady, beside him at the very moment when I said ' Your wife is an abominable female '—did I say abominable or loathsome ? I forget !—' And all your old pals including myself consider

you've ruined yourself by marrying her. Throw her off, man, throw her off!' That was the time for him to agree and get rid of her. Permanently. No woman of spirit could stop with a man aware of the opinion of his pals. But he's ruined, I tell you. His pluck is broken. He just sniggered and moved away backwards conciliatingly; and She, the hag, the doll, the curly hypocrite, murmured: 'Come along, Bertie!'—I ask you! 'Come along, Bertie!' . . . Antonia, who's that Florentine page lying over there among the cushions wondering about the handsome young man with hair like the village idiot?"

Deb started at this accurate guess at her reflections, and Cliffe Kennedy grinned at her in excellent fellowship.

Mrs Verity exclaimed: "Forgive me, I have been exceedingly remiss. I should have introduced you before, indeed I should. How could I have neglected to do so?"—though it was hard to say at which point of Mr Kennedy's speech she could have effected the introduction.

"This is Antonia's great friend, Deb Marcus. Miss Marcus, Mr Cliffe Kennedy. Cliffe, I will think about the problem of your friend and his wife. I am sure you meant to do good by your intercession. It seems to me a great pity under the circumstances that they should be definitely and not merely experimentally married. And now, since we may not meet again to-day——" She bade good-bye to Deb and Kennedy, patted her daughter's shoulder, and slipped unobtrusively away.

"Well," flung out Kennedy to Deb, "was I right about the village idiot?"

She glanced at his golden shock-head, and parried to save herself. "I see no straws spiking in every direction in your hair."

"And you can't make village idiots without straw. Good. Nor can you break camels' backs. Nor tell which way the wind is blowing."

"Nor eat ice-cream sodas."

"The straw is a useful animal. Awful dearth of village idiots because Selfridge's have made a corner in straws for their soda fountain. Species practically extinct. Sole surviving specimen, C. Kennedy, Esq., fireman, pageant-maker and pork-butcher. Pageants and pork while you pause. Preposterous prices! Antonia, you remember my inspiration

for a grand historical pageant of barques up the Thames in commemoration of the death of Ethelred the Unready ? "

" I remember a few rough suggestions you threw out, of a sort of Lord Mayor's show," laughed Antonia, " presenting every sort of special occasion on which the English people were notoriously unready, headed by Ethelred himself, refusing to get up on his wedding-morning because he had overtired himself the night before, taking cinema films of a tortoise——"

" And ending with a symbolic presentment of the proverb ' Always lock the stable door after the horse has got away ; it does no harm and amuses the horse '—tableau of same, with horse smiling happily over the adjoining hedge. Would you believe it, Antonia, that when I approached the Lord Mayor on the subject, and put it to him that this was the undoubted moment for the Educational Value of such a moral lesson upon the psychology of the gritty-nosed board-school child, and would he lend me some of the comic costumes and coachmen he must have lying about from his own piffling show—Antonia, he said : ' Young man, are you aware that this country is at war ? ' and handed me a white feather torn from the hindmost of a flock of geese who happened to be waddling across the hall. I didn't lose my temper, Antonia. I put it into my button-hole, and said very calmly, ' Thank you—that's the second present I've had to-day,' and turning back the coat lapel on the other side, I showed him my V.C. where the King had pinned it. Then all the geese rose on their hind legs and cheered——"

Deb's childish peals of laughter broke off his narration. Till the last episode recounted, she had been in bewilderment trying to sift fantasy from fact ; with such vivid conviction did the speaker present each succeeding picture : the smiling horse, the mayor bending for the feather, the proud young V.C. . . . but that incident at least might quite well be true——

" *Are* you a V.C. ? "

He gave her rather a queer look from his candid forget-me-not blue eyes. And he put down his cup and walked sharply to the window, and remarked in a very matter-of-fact tone : " No. I've been medically rejected for the Army. You see, I've only been given another year to live, and I suppose they thought it a pity to reduce the allowance."

" Never mind, Cliffe," said Antonia gently—and Deb, the tears choking in her throat, waited for the message of divine womanly consolation that was doubtless on its way—" A

well-meaning man can tell an enormous quantity of lies even in one year. Don't give up. Look at him well, Deb—he has a wrinkle in his face for every lie his lips have spoken."

The man turned round to give the entire benefit of his long face, webbed and wrinkled by a thousand evidences of inaccurate statement. Sombrely he looked at Deb:

"Shall I tell you how I was cured of my habit of lying, in spite of Antonia? Yes, cured, by God, and by pretty drastic means. . . ." He bent his chin on to his hands. Deb knew instinctively that on this one occasion, if never again, out of a fever of imaginative falsehood was emerging a simple and rather poignant piece of truth——

"Never mind the details," he broke out abruptly—"just take it that there was a woman, and she loved me—I never knew how much. She was responsive to my moods as a field of barley to the wind—rustling to shadow and waving back to pure light. A field of barley, I tell you!" he cried fiercely, striking the table with his fist. . . . "I was miserably depressed over something or other—again a detail—and she tried to laugh it off. That irritated me—she wasn't taking the tragedy seriously enough. *My* tragedy! 'Ring me up tomorrow, Cliffe, between seven and eight, and let me hear the worst,' and again that forced silly little laugh. I replied with an inflexion of mocking composure—intensely dramatic: 'Very well, dear. If I haven't rung up by five minutes to eight, you'll know I've put a bullet through my head.' And left it at that."

He brooded a moment.

"I rang up at two minutes past eight. And it was she who had put a bullet through her head. . . . Couldn't endure the prospect of life without me. Oh, no, I hadn't waited deliberately; I was merely rather rushed, and I'd forgotten the terms of my farewell the evening before. And she had waited . . . at the other end . . . fifty-five minutes of slow agony. . . ."

"Well, you can understand it cured me of the habit of the effective lie."

The girls were both silent. The light was fading from the studio. Antonia's voice spoke with a quiver of laughing accusation: "Cliffe, dear, do I spy another and very recent wrinkle?"

Deb cried in sharp distress, "Oh, Antonia . . ." for either

the other had trodden with profane feet on sacred ground, or . . . She appealed to Cliffe. "It *was* true?"

"It depends what you mean by true," he replied with the air of a man slowly descending to earth by parachute. "I think that somewhere or other, and for the reason I have told you, a woman must have sat listening through fifty-five moments for the tinkle of a telephone bell to release her—or how could I know it all so vividly? They say the human imagination is incapable of conceiving outside reality. That the man was not myself?—an accident. Or perhaps it was indeed myself, and I have forgotten it, and in telling you this as a mere tale I'm calling truth itself a lie. . . ."

"I must go," said Deb politely. "Good-bye."

"I'll see you home, wherever it is." Cliffe lounged to his feet.

"No, thanks," coldly.

"But I want to. You're angry with me. And I must put myself right——"

"By another lie?" A flame of indignation in the grey eyes that accused him of rousing her emotions by false pretences. Deb had been profoundly moved by the climax of the tale.

Cliffe argued good-humouredly: "For goodness' sake, why all this arbitrary distinction between what I invent and what God invents. Of course I'll see you home."

"Deb's stopping to supper with me," Antonia struck in. "She's dying to ask me all about you, and my account will be just as picturesque and much more reliable than yours."

"But, Antonia, I thought you were supping out—with Gillian somebody?"

"Mother said so. I didn't. I'm supposed to go to some very dull people and I've decided to 'phone them off."

"What do you think of our Gillian?" Cliffe asked of Deb.

"I don't know her."

"Don't know her—but she's always here or at Zoe's."

"Who's Zoe?"

Kennedy turned excitedly to Antonia: "I say, they must meet, mustn't they? I believe she and Gillian would hit it off frightfully well. And Zoe's a whole music-hall entertainment in herself, though I abominate the Spanish Jew of a shoemaker she's walking out with now. Let's phone them to come round here to-night. And Winny too——"

"This isn't a branch of the Y.W.C.A., Cliffe," Antonia tried

amusedly to check his exuberant overflow of conviviality. But Cliffe ran on.

"No—let me see—Zoe shows off best in her own Palais Royale flat—she needs all the doors and cupboards to be really at her best. I'll give a tea-party there next Saturday. Blair Stevenson may be up on leave, and has asked me to let him meet that singer woman I told him about, with hair just like mine! You must meet her too, Miss Marcus—you positively must."

"You mean La llorraine—oh, I know her well." Deb was glad to have found one name familiar among all these pattering new names.

"Good. You'll come to the tea-party? Antonia will bring you—it's in a street rather tricky to find. I'm keen on backing Zoe against La llorraine for sheer verbal energy. Take the field bar none. For this evening we'll just have Gillian and Winifred and Theo. Shall I 'phone them, Antonia, or will you?"

"You can," said Antonia. "No—bother! Gillian is away till Tuesday, and Winny without her sends me to sleep. And Theo Pandos is a bounder—Deb wouldn't care about him."

"That brings the party down to the present three. At least, I suppose I can stop to supper, Antonia, as you're not going out after all? You haven't invited me yet."

"Of course you can. Don't you know that a studio girl always keeps a stray tin of sardines in the cupboard?"

"And a black and emerald cushion on the divan. Curse it, what I've had to suffer dodging the lure of the generic studio cushion. But yours is hardly the generic studio, Antonia. You actually use it for the quaint and unusual purpose of painting pictures in it. The girl of nowadays rents a studio to picnic in by moonlight, or because it has such a ducksome musician's gallery to sleep in, or a parquet floor for fox-trotting, or an acoustic. Have you a studio, Miss Marcus? Excuse me not calling you by your Christian name for a few weeks, but the whimsical Bohemian vagabond, a species whom I abhor, always uses Christian names within three minutes of introduction."

"Or else a charming invented name," Deb supplemented. "I'll call you 'Big-Brother-Man' and you shall call me 'All-Alone-Girl.'"

"Or you call me 'Daddy Longlegs' and I'll call you 'Peg o' my Heart.'"

"*May* I? Oh, may I *really*? And *will* you? Will you *really*?"

"Antonia, I'm rather taken with this new person. Where did you pick her up?"

"In a boarding-house. Go on appreciating her, while I 'phone up my hostess for this evening and tell her I have tooth-ache." Antonia ran up the two steps to the door which led to the house; and stood an instant poised on the topmost, surveying Deb and Cliffe with a provocative smile: "It makes me so happy to think that the two beings whom I love most on earth may also grow to love each other. . . ."

She vanished. And Cliffe murmured: "And she doesn't care a snap of the fingers for either of us."

"No. More than anyone else I've met, Antonia is absolutely sufficient unto herself."

"Yet one can't leave her alone. She's always the indifferent centre of a swarm of nibblers. What's the attraction, I wonder."

"Have you ever caressed a crystal or a lump of jade, or an ornament in soapstone, something with a surface perfectly smooth and cool—something hard and cut and clear, without fuss or anything except its own polish and beauty? . . . that's the beauty of Antonia, and her fascination."

"An exquisite statuette in green bronze, standing high up on the mantelpiece. Psyche with the lamp."

"Artemis. Psyche is too human—too curious."

"More in your line—eh?"

Deb shook her head. And on pretext of needing to do her hair afresh for supper, she followed Antonia into the house. She required to snatch some general information from Antonia about this long, thin beaky-nosed Cliffe Kennedy, with the sunny, forget-me-not blue eyes, and outrageously nimble tongue, before she presented him with the confidences for which he was angling. As she emerged from the garden passage into the hall, she heard Antonia speaking in that peculiarly distinct voice one reserves for the telephone: "No, I want Gillian—Oh, isn't she?—Well, listen, Winny—Say I simply must go out to-night. I muddled the days—I expect her to-morrow night instead. . . ."

Deb walked slowly through the hall and up the stairs. She was puzzled. . . .

Antonia had not seen her. A moment later she came into the bedroom.

"Oh, was Cliffe too much for you?"

"You said you would tell me about him."

"Certainly," said Antonia obligingly, sitting on the edge of the bed and clasping her hands round her knees. "He's a rich subject—Cliffe Kennedy, aged twenty-nine—only son of a perfectly sweet old mother. He's a completely harmless-uncle type, from the sex point of view; and also the most dangerous and mischievous person that ever walked this earth, because he attracts all confidences and secrets, and then betrays them lavishly as the freakish impulse takes him."

"But forewarned——"

"Is *not* forearmed—with Cliffe. He has a magnetic and fatal lure, that draws and draws you. . . . You seek comfort each time by an instinctive self-assurance that just this once and only this once Cliffe is to be trusted; and when he is relating one of his best impromptus, your instinct equally assures you that just this once and only this once Cliffe is telling the truth. Yes, you needn't flush quite so hotly, Deb; which one was it you believed? The episode which cured him of lying? Why, he lies by mechanism. He keeps a sort of stock-pot, into which he throws the bare bones of every dramatic incident which takes his fancy, and fishes it up again meated with personal application. He's everybody's best friend and everybody's worst enemy in succession, and gyrates from one extreme to the other so quickly that you may be unburdening your inmost heart to him under an entirely false impression that you are still on the friendly category. There's the gong, Deb. Any more questions, before the Court rises?"

"Why isn't your best boy in khaki?" laughed Deb.

"He has been medically rejected. That bit of information happened to be correct. It's those dotted fragments of truth which make the whole so perilous. It can't be altogether discarded."

"And has he really only a year to live? Oh, Antonia——"

"Bless your tears of sympathy, little girl. Cliffe will probably be a hale old man of eighty. Come along. . . ."

. . . . . .

Mrs Verity detained Deb after supper on some pretext, while Cliffe and Antonia returned to the studio. In any

normal mother, this piece of manœuvring could easily be interpreted as a wish to further a favourable "match" for Antonia; and Mrs Verity's intentions were similar and yet startlingly dissimilar; she was benignly hopeful that a free union with that charming Mr Kennedy would be that step in the wrong direction, which she so earnestly desired for Antonia's good.

"Antonia is the sweetest of companions, and also deserves my supreme respect as an artist," she told Deb. "But sometimes, Miss Marcus, and oh, I trust indeed that I may be mistaken, sometimes she strikes me as being just a trifle narrow-minded. She seems too content to accept those illogical conventions which have been fetishes since countless years. It would grieve me inexpressibly if Antonia should miss some of the Fullness of life. Do you not agree with me, Miss Marcus, and pray, if you do not agree, do not hesitate to contradict me—do not hesitate to call me unreasonable, but do you not think"—mittened hands fervently clasped in her lap—"that it is Antonia's duty to the Age to be a little more abandoned in her conduct?"

If one could judge by Kennedy's conversation during the rest of the evening, Antonia's friends at least were certainly not to be complained of in that respect. Cliffe slaughtered their presumable confidences with as little ruth as a butcher slaughters lambs, and then disported himself merrily among the mangled heaps. A certain Theo Pandos, after completely maiming the glorious genius of Gillian Sherwood, was flirting shamefully with "Winifred," who, it seemed, was found in dire need by Gillian on her doorstep, and taken in and clothed and fed. "And I tell you, Antonia, and this is Gospel truth, that sticky, white-slug girl has done the doorstep trick before. . . . Blair Stevenson knows a man who swears for a fact he met her at Tom Maryon's, the dramatist, three years ago, under the very same conditions. He made Blair take his oath never to breathe one word about it, for fear of making mischief. *One* doorstep?—she's lain on twenty-seven doorsteps."

From "Winifred," Cliffe went on to "Zoe" and "Blair," and was equally startling in his revelations. There was nothing of vindictive or paltry gossip in Cliffe's stupendous onslaughts upon the truth. He committed mortality on lines that waxed from merely generous to colossal, breath-taking. He flung about reputations and caught them, as deftly as a juggler his

plates ; or dropped them with magnificent disregard of the smash. Treachery was here conducted on as opulent a scale of grandeur as falsehood. Coincidence was blown out to a lusty, full-bellied creature triumphant over those meagre, lean-throated sisters of accuracy and consistency. No human being could have survived one day of life under such a stress of superlative achievement, such haphazard of occurrence, such complicated interplay of motives, actions, and reactions.

Antonia did not interrupt Mr Cliffe Kennedy's entertainment. It was a very fine one-man performance, and lasted until eleven o'clock. Then he relapsed into moody depression, and said he would go mad unless he could be solitary . . . but would kindly see Deb home first, if she promised not to talk.

And he hovered a moment on tip-toe, taller even than nature had made him, looking down at Antonia with a wry smile ; where she lay dreamily back in her chair, with hands clasped behind the beautiful, delicate shape of her head. Then he bent, and took that head between his long, thin, brown fingers, as though she were a holy saint, and reverently touched her forehead with his lips, and put her from him, and swung out of the studio.

Deb understood that it was a kiss of renunciation. And that his passion for Antonia was very real and very hopeless. . . .

Did Antonia know of it ?

Antonia telephoned early the next morning to make amused enquiry how much of her inmost soul Deb had been lured to commit to Kennedy's precarious keeping during the homeward walk.

Deb faltered an evasive reply, ashamed to confess that she had inexplicably delivered up to this persuasive highwayman of secrets the complete comedy and tragedy of the Chorus.

" Did he say anything about me ? " Antonia questioned her further.

Again Deb faltered an evasive reply . . . whilst in her ears rang a guilty echo of Cliffe's peroration to the bizarre history of Charlotte Verity's bold infatuation for a now defunct Arctic explorer who was Cliffe's own father (" twenty-nine years ago. And all this time neither she nor I have dared to tell Antonia that she's my own half-sister and a child of love." . . .)

" No, nothing, Antonia."

"What did he talk about, then? Well—whom did he talk about?"

"His m-mother."

"Deb, I can positively hear you squirming. Own up. Why are you shielding him?"

"I'm not," protested Deb unhappily.

Antonia let her off. "What are you doing to-day?"

"I think I'll go to Hampstead and ask myself to tea with the Rothenburgs—the Redburys, I mean. Nell was the kiddy I introduced to you last week; you liked her, didn't you?"

"Yes—I've just rung her up to invite her to the show of etchings at the Leicester Galleries."

"Never mind. I can see her another time."

"Sure you don't mind?"

"Not a bit. Any message for La llorraine? I'll pay them a visit this afternoon, instead of the Redburys."

"Will you? Then I shall probably come on there after the show—if you don't object."

"Why should I object? I'm very happy in your company."

"I accept your act of homage," serenely.

"'Tisn't anything of the sort," Deb repudiated the suggestion with extreme indignation.

"Very well, dear. Ask your Aunt Stella if she'll lunch with me to-morrow."

"Me too?"

"The perfect hostess never mixes her generations."

"That's an excuse not to give me lunch."

"You may come to supper the day after, if you bring your brother, as you once promised."

"And my grandfather?"

"The old Hun? Certainly. I prefer him to the oh-so-English Mr Otto Redbury, anyway."

"Does the oh-so-English Herr Otto Rothenburg go and sit in the bathroom and sulk when you are there? because it honours you too highly if he appears, and you might get conceited about it."

"On the contrary, he entertains me with his most irreproachable Jingo sentiments—rather loudly, in case a policeman is posted outside the door."

"An old lady has been posted outside this door for a good

twenty minutes, waiting to wash her hands. Shall I let her in ? "

" I don't quite follow."

" The 'phone and the wash-basin live together at Montague Hall. Good-bye, Antonia—do you like me ? "

" Moderately. Good-bye, child."

CHAPTER II

I

THE Redburys were at Saturday dinner. Their numbers indicated a party, but in reality no one but the intimate family was present. Mr and Mrs Redbury, their sons Hardy and David; Hardy's wife Beatrice, and her brother Sampson Phillips; the two daughters of the house, Hedda and Nell; and Miss Swinley, the strictly English governess. Four members were missing from the company: Con, the eldest Redbury, since several months at the Front; Wilhelmina, the infant child of Hardy and Beatrice, who had annoyed her grandfather and been banished to the nursery; Hedda's husband, Gustav Furth, interned in England for being a German; and Max, the boy who came between Hardy and David, interned in Germany for being an Englishman.

The international situation round the table was one of extremest delicacy. Otto Rothenburg had settled in England for business purposes, and was naturalized directly after his marriage with Trudchen Wagner. But he made no secret of his dislike of the English, and his contempt of the semi-English; and had always petulantly insisted that *his* household should be conducted on sound and hearty Teuton principles, of which the main points were a diet of rich sufficiency for the elders, and no nonsense and no discrimination for the tribe of children. Though the quantity of these—six alive and two dead—indicated that he did not confine his German ideas wholly to the table. Each of the six played a chosen musical instrument—chosen by Herr Rothenburg himself, be it remarked. The two girls had frequently been burdened by plaid frocks; German was the language spoken as a matter of course at meals; filial obedience and the good-night kiss were insisted upon; and there was a frequent coming and going of relatives scattered over Germany and Austria, with large gay packets of gingerbread tied up in silver paper; or of polite unknowns bearing letters of introduction from the

Rothenburg relatives abroad ; and very eager to be invited to a meal.

When Hedvig, at eighteen, was wedded to a German, her father was delighted. Hedvig herself had never been consulted on the match. When Gerhardt, at twenty-four, had displayed unexpected initiative and engaged himself to Beatrice Phillips, Rothenburg fretted and objected and sulked, and locked himself in the bathroom, and came out again when it was least desirable that he should do so ; and during a full six months rendered the lives of all about him wholly unbearable. He was finally only reconciled to the bride's English birth and parentage by her large settlements. Max, two years younger than Gerhardt, was, however, immediately despatched out of danger to his Uncle Karl in Hanover, there to learn the business and eventually to marry his Uncle Karl's daughter Klara. Konrad's enthusiasm for territorial drill—well, with a stretch of the imagination, that could be ascribed to his German blood revealing itself in a wistful passion for the obligatory military service which could never be his ; therefore, Konrad, who of all the brood was his mother's darling, was grudgingly permitted to remain in London and read for the Bar. David, sent to a day-school, was destined later for Heidelberg University, as a corrective to any ultra-English notions which St Crispin's may have put into his head.

And then had occurred this most inconvenient war.

Herr Otto Rothenburg did not wait to be subtle about his change of front. Immediately he scuttled for cover. He became in name, in sentiment and in habit what he already was by law—a fine old English gentleman. His household was revolutionized ; he turned livid at the sound of a single German word spoken ; he clung to such English acquaintances as were his, with a limpet-like fervour of affection which no coldness could disconcert. He forbade all communication with relatives abroad ; and all mention of them. In short, Mr Otto Redbury was afraid. To their mother's utter bewilderment, Hedvig, Lenchen, Konrad and Gerhardt were metamorphosed to Hedda, Nell, Con and Hardy. His fever reached its zenith when Gustav Furth, an unnaturalized German of military age, was arrested and interned. And his daughter Hedda, penniless and unprotected, but in the highest spirits, returned to the parental roof, with the obvious and natural intention of remaining where she was for the duration of the

war. Once supremely her father's good girl, Hedda was not at all popular in this crisis. It was difficult airily to disavow all enemy connection, with concerned enquiries emanating from all quarters as to Furth's whereabouts and treatment. Supposing, too, that when she came to the house, Beatrice should be offended at Hedda's presence there . . . Beatrice, that never-to-be-sufficiently appreciated link with solid British stock!

Beyond a little astonished realization at finding herself encircled by alien enemies—her attitude conveyed that she had never noticed before that the Rothenburgs were German—Beatrice had a nature too well-bred and womanly—gentlewomanly, David was wont to call it—to have expressed as yet any sort of resentment. She was very nice and tactful to Hedda about "poor Gustav." It was a miracle that Hardy could have been sensible and far-seeing enough as to have married so successfully. Mr Redbury propitiated her with a determination and unction that—again to quote David—"fair gives one the sicks." But then Mr Redbury was desperately afraid.

"Bodadoes, Beatty, mein Schatz?" enquired Mrs Redbury, dumpy and apple-cheeked and very harrassed by her husband's perpetual amendment of her accent, and by the awful trinity of Briton's representatives present in the dining-room.

And Beatrice blushed faintly and glanced apologetically at her brother Samson, who looked as wooden as though a toast of the King had just been proposed. Miss Swinley coughed, a delicate and pensive cough; something had annoyed Miss Swinley that morning, and she was ripe for revenge.

"I met a vellow in de Zity dis morning," said Mr Redbury, glaring at his wife, "who vould by no means pelieve dat I vos bartly a voreigner. 'Vot—you?—go on! all dese years I dake you for a bure-plooded Priton!' He roared with laughter ven I told him my selige father was porn in Amsterdam. He vouldn't pelieve me. 'Your vife,' he said, 'she speaks wiz a slight aggsent. But you are von of us, Redbury, old man.' He *vouldn't* pelieve me——" himself roaring with laughter, but still glaring at Trudchen.

"And when I told him how beautiful you were," sang Hedda—David kicked her to shut up. He could not bear it when the old man made an ass of himself.

"He wouldn't believe me . . ." Hedda chirrupped

irrepressibly. The world bereft of Gustav was so full of radiant possibilities that she could not refrain from bursting out. For her, at least, the war was not entirely an evil thing.

Mr Redbury spoke quite correct English, but his accent was not so irreproachable as to justify the complete good faith of the " vellow in the Zity." And that " selige " had slipped in by mistake ; and would prevent him from being quite so privately nasty to his wife about " mein Schatz " as he had anticipated.

A joint appeared on the table simultaneously with the post. One letter bearing the " opened by Censor " label, black letters on white pasted across the slit of the envelope, was handed by the servant to Mrs Redbury.

" Ach Gott ! von der liebsten besten Anna ! " as a second letter was revealed under cover of the first.

Mr Redbury hissed out a venomous " Put it away ! " which his wife, fumbling and tearful over this communication from her beloved elder sister in Berlin, neither heard nor heeded. Mr Redbury dared not insist, in front of Rhoda, the parlour-maid—not to mention Beatrice, Samson Phillips and Miss Swinley. Besides, though his sway might be peevishly unpleasant, it never exacted the awed obedience yielded to a true despot. He quivered with horror at the present predicament, as it dawned upon him that his wife intended to read aloud the letter from Germany, in little bursts and snatches of joy. David was encouraging her by eager questions—that boy had no sense whatever. Mr Redbury began to talk very loud and fast.

" It makes me broud to see all the ghagi round my table " —he looked unutterable compliments at Samson Phillips' captain's uniform, then possessively at Hardy, who was short-sighted and had only been admitted to Home Service ; and at David, a public-school cadet. " If only Con vere here, to gomblete our number ; did I tell you, Captain Villips, zat my eldest boy has been mentioned in disbatches for botting four Huns wiz his *own* rifle ? "

" Glad to hear Con has a sense of property ! " muttered David.

" Ei, die Arme ! " cried Mrs Redbury, weeping. " Franz has been shot. You remember little Franz, Otto ? Ach verzeihen Sie—forgive me, Captain Villips. Such a dear little

boy, my sister's youngest. He stayed with us for a whole year, and learnt his lessons wiz Nell."

Vindictively Mr Redbury carved all the gristle for Hedda, who had a German husband. It was a vent to his feelings. He showed a nice discrimination in reserving the juiciest bits for Beatrice; Miss Swinley, he judged correctly, was past all such caressing treatment; one could safely anticipate her month's notice the very next morning. Not that she was really necessary any longer to superintend Nell's studies. Nell was seventeen, and in the ordinary course of events, would have been "out" next year. But Miss Swinley would spread a report that her principles would not permit her to remain in a household so pronouncedly pro-German. . . . To Mr Redbury's jaundiced fancy, the tread of the policeman sounded nearer. And he was never far away—that mythical policeman.

"Oh, Mother, is there anything about Max?" asked Nell, her dark liquid eyes wistful with anxiety for her favourite brother.

Mrs Redbury fluttered the thin foreign pages, crossed with pointed scribble. "But yes—Max is well as can be hoped, and his Uncle Karl makes enquiries that he is gomfortable. That good Karl! And—ach, unglaublich!—his own nephew, Otto Salinger, is in a gonfinement camp over here, and Karl asks if we, in return, vill find him out and be nice to him? But yes, indeed; perhaps ze poor young man vould like some of my Dampfnudeln; he vill surely be homesick. Otto, do you hear?"

Miss Swinley repeated her pensive cough. And Mr Redbury, wrathfully ignoring the question of his unfortunate namesake, addressed himself again to Captain Phillips.

"Ven do you think we shall knock them out definitely?" His loud tones drowning Trudchen's agitated twitter. "I have had a tip to lay in yards and yards and yards of punting."

Samson Phillips' handsome, heavy features expressed bewilderment.

"Punting?"

"Rather overdone the bunting to-day, haven't you, father?" David suggested impertinently. It was flag-day for one of the minor Balkan states, and Mr Redbury wore his expensive trophies duplicated and tripled, with the air of a General bespattered with honourable medals.

Mr Redbury told an anecdote of the titled lady who had decorated him. And then Beatrice asked :

" Do you really think we shall win the war so soon ? It's almost too good to be true, isn't it ? " her pleasant, well-bred English voice was a relief after so much duologue from her parents-in-law. " But I don't think it's very nice of the Germans to use liquid fire, do you ? "

Hardy beamed at her fondly through his glasses. " Not very nice of them, no. Not drawing-room manners, is it, darling ? " He was a man of quaint appearance, a startlingly fair replica of Nell and David, who had the dark melancholy eyes, aquiline cast of feature, and sensitive lips that stamped them true Hebrew. But Hardy, with his light eyes, light hair, light skin, and enormous nose, gave somewhat the impression of a Jew who had been well bleached. Hedda's colouring lay between the two extremes. Con enjoyed the good looks of the family ; blue eyes always afire with mirth ; tall, athletic figure ; incarnate good-nature and high spirits, he was adored by his men, and well-liked by his superior officers. As for his mother—not Max nor Hardy nor David, nor Hedda nor Nell, could in sum equal her love for this miracle of an eldest-born, now in the trenches.

" Are you laughing at me ? " Beatrice remained quite serene. " Yes, please ; I will have some cream."

" Die Anna writes zat zere is only a wee-little milk for each child in Berlin ; not enough to keep zem alive, she say."

" Let zem die ! " cried Mr Redbury, with a ferocity that was really foreign to his nature—only he was afraid. " All the better. Let zem all die. Zey only grow up to be Cherman soldiers fighting against humanity."

Nell flashed out : " Oh, father, how can you ?—little soft babies——" and suddenly plunged back into silence, marvelling at her own temerity.

David as usual supported her in rebellion. " Not all German babies grow up to be German soldiers. Some grow up to be English soldiers " . . . his ironic downward glance at his own uniform emphasized the remark.

" If Con were here, young 'un, he'd lick you for that," and Hardy sent a message of strong disapproval over his glasses at his cadet brother.

" Con's different. However keen he may be on his regiment

and England and all that, he never talks fatuous drivel about wanting all the German babies to die."

"Vatuous trivel . . ." shouted Mr Redbury.

"Dear me," murmured Miss Swinley.

"I'm sure David doesn't mean to be rude, father," Beatrice put in mildly. "We none of us want babies to die, but of course it's nicer if it isn't English babies."

David laughed. And his father ordered him from the table. Nell immediately slipped from her seat and joined him at the door.

"Ach Lenchen!" sobbed Mrs Redbury. "And you haf not touched the pie on your blate!"

"Gom back!" roared Mr Redbury. For there was always a possibility that she might find favour in the eyes of Samson Phillips. He had noticed with pleasure that a secret understanding seemed to exist between them; frequently they whispered together. . . . "My son-in-law a Captain in ze Zappers!" . . . Another link with safety. One might almost defy the policeman then.

II

The parlour-maid accosted David at the foot of the stairs. "Young Mr Marcus is in the schoolroom, sir. He said he would wait for you there."

"Oh—thanks, Rhoda."

"Hullo, Marcus. Not end of the term yet, is it? Scarlet fever again?"

"No. I've chucked Winborough." Richard was lounging on the shabby fender-seat, drumming with one heel against the side of the fireplace. He was not looking well; dark marks under his eyes and a rather drawn expression round the mouth caused David, who was observant, to scrutinize him with some attention. He was rather surprised at this visit. On the whole Richard was not wont to seek out his society with overmuch enthusiasm. Richard's friends were mostly sturdy athletes of the Greville Dunne order, who summed up David as "sloppy" because he played the cello, and hated games.

"Chucked Winborough? That's pretty casual. What does your guv'nor say?"

"Said I could do as I liked about it."

"Good Lord! mine would bellow the house down. He's just slung me out of the dining-room over some nonsense about German and English babies."

David threw himself disconsolately in the battered old armchair. The other boy glanced up with sudden interest.

"What's your family's attitude towards the war?"

"We're all at sixes and sevens. Father's more English than the English; and mother sits and worries in alternate layers over Con and her own people in Germany. Does not mention them, of course. Hardy is a genuine patriot, I believe, without making much row about it. Of course being married to Beatrice has influenced him. We hang the fact of Beatrice out in the front garden like the clean washing. . . . Sickening. And all the while there's Max interned over there—and Gustave interned over here—also unmentionable . . . not that Hedda minds much. But father. . . . You should see his face when visitors enquire after 'poor Mr Furth'—and they do it as if they were treading on egg-shells. The etiquette of internment is as yet very precarious. One isn't at all sure if Gustave is to be exalted as a martyr or mysteriously hushed up as though he were a convict—I say, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm in for it too, that's all."

"Internment? You, Marcus? I—I'm sorry. I'd no idea. . . ."

"All right. You needn't do the egg-shell trick. I was born in Germany, and father didn't have me naturalized, that's all."

David was silent a moment, thoughtfully staring at his boots. "Has he appealed?"

"Yes. No good. The Government has condoned too many cases, and the Anti-German section are beginning to protest. So they've had to tighten up again. We've got a let-off from deportation for grandfather and Aunt Stella. Can't expect more, with all these spy cases about."

He went on in a very matter-of-fact voice: "I couldn't stick Winborough this term. Just knowing.—It's absurd—I was as keen to lick the Germans as ever—but how could *I* join in when the fellows jawed about Huns and wiping 'em off the face of the earth. . . . I felt crimson inside—beastly—as though I were there on false pretences. And all the chaps of my age were preparing to join up next year . . . last term I was still one of them. They couldn't understand why. . . .

It had to come out at last—the Head knew all along, naturally. But we were playing the Meltonians in their own field, twelve miles away—and I had to register and get permission, show my photograph—all that mush. Like a ticket-of-leave man. The fellows were awfully decent. They didn't even cut me. Harrison, speaking for the majority, went so far as to say it was rough luck, and they knew I couldn't help it "—Richard's underlip twisted sardonically. " But they weren't quite sure, after that, what ought to be said in front of me . . . dead pauses when I strolled up to one group or another. . . . I came home at half-term, last Monday, and I'm not going back."

" So you're out of it," whispered David, still staring as though fascinated at his boots. " Out of the fighting, and the need of fighting, and the need to choose . . . you lucky beggar. Oh, you lucky beggar. . . ."

" I realize the fact that I'm out of it, thanks. But I don't quite follow your congratulations."

" It's that . . . I've been in Germany, two or three times, once for six months, and—Oh, Richard, what has *happened* to the old Germany, the Germany we knew, to change it so ? I simply *can't* realize that they commit atrocities in Belgium and sink hospital ships and mutilate children, and are bragging and swaggering and blood-letting all over Europe. . . . I can only remember the little things—the silly, comfortable little things. . . . You follow the stream, and in a clearing in the heart of the great blue pinewood you come bang on the sturdy old forest-house, with antlers branching over the wooden doorway, and the coat-of-arms of some royalty . . . perhaps you may catch a glimpse of him in his green hunting-coat . . . tables with check blue and red cloths, and saucers of wood-strawberries like tiny drops of blood—do you know the smell and flavour of wood-strawberries ?—and a flaxen peasant child who watches you with enormous solemn eyes while you eat, and curtseys by clockwork for hours after you've left her. . . . And all over the country the ridiculous wooden signposts that say on one arm ' Zum Biergarten,' and on the other ' Zum Aussichtspunkt," and never get tired of it—and you never get tired of it either. Or of leaning out of your window in the early morning to hear them play the Chorale, slow and pure and stately—and the ground is a mist of blue bilberries—and the Rhine legends jostle each other on your excursion, and you

send off postcards on which everybody signs their names—and everyone says good-day—and everyone is musical."

"Good God, how awful," was Richard's *sotto voce* comment on this list of blisses.

David heard, and said rather impatiently: "You've been to Germany, haven't you? Can't you understand what I mean?"

Richard ransacked his memory for a single incident or aspect of Dorzheim which had found tender home in his heart, and discovered not one.

"All the little things . . ." David murmured again, hands clasped behind his head, and eyes mournfully brooding on the past. "Oh, I know I'm a sentimental idiot, but I can't shake it all off to command. Not at once."

"If you feel like that, I don't honestly see why you need join up. 'Tisn't compulsory."

"I've got to . . . there'd be such a fuss with father—and he would never forgive me. Max can't, and Hardy's married. . . . There's only Con and me. Con—well, you know him—he rings British wherever you sound him. . . . I've seen mother look at him as though wondering how he could ever have happened to be her son. I don't want Con to despise me—he's always been ripping to us younger ones. And then—oh, just because there's a doubt about us all, we can't afford, as a family, to have a slacker about. If our name had always been Redbury"—again that melancholy smile and shrug of the shoulders, so typically Jewish.

"Have you changed it?"

"Dear old man, you didn't commit the horrible error of asking our parlour-maid for Mr David Rothenburg?"

"Yes, I did. Sorry. I believe Deb warned me, but I forgot. Does it matter?"

"She may give notice to-morrow . . . we live uncomfortably on a tight-rope nowadays, and some of us haven't learnt how to walk it yet. Poor mother, for instance—she's always side-slipping. Rhoda is fairly new, and father deludes himself that she doesn't know our guilty secret. I say, you remember Miss Swinley?" The mischievous school-boy was uppermost in David now—"and how proud she was of being descended from the Hereford Swinleys? Well, now it's got round to her how someone said publicly that of course she's really a German and everybody knows her real name is Schweinthal!"

Richard threw back his head and filled the room with his guffaws.

"Schweinthal—Swine-valley . . . Swinley! Oh, that's top-hole! She was always so jolly full of swank and backbone. But all the same, Redbury, I'm all at sea with these swarms of English county people that have magically cropped up in our set during the last few weeks. No offence meant to you, but who the deuce are the Lanes and the Silvertons and the Mounts and the Gordons and the Meadowes?"

"All old familiar faces really. And I can tell you who the Mounts and the Meadowes are, anyhow . . . they're each one-half of my cousins, the Wiesenbergs. The elder and younger branch of the family have long been at daggers drawn, and they've hailed the opportunity to split into two. And the Mounts know nothing of the Meadowes, nor shall the Meadowes ever go to meet the Mounts. My other cousin, whose father changed his name about forty years ago, swears that he'll change it back again from Holmes to Hohenheim by way of protest to all the funk and flurry."

"Quite a pleasing moment at our boarding-house last week, when two Scandinavian ladies were introduced to each other and neither knew the language."

"But both broke into floods of delighted German? That's what happens these days when Swede meets Swede."

"Aunt Stella says speaking German nowadays is as good a thrill as the invention of a new sin, and far superior to secret drinking or smoking or swearing. . . . You do it in a dark room, under your breath, looking over your shoulder."

"And in public you carefully mispronounce German towns and Generals, in case it should be suspected that you pronounce them not wisely but too well. Father's getting quite a dab at throwing off his little jokes about the Kayzer. Comic birthplaces are the fashion as well; two of the Ladenbach girls, when the question crops up, have been instructed to say they were born in a wagon-lit; and the boy Julius, on the steps of the Venezuelan Consulate. . . ."

"Looks as if Frau Ladenbach had dropped 'em about rather carelessly," chuckled Richard. He was glad he had come this afternoon. It was years since he had been at all intimate with David Rothenburg, and the impulse to seek him out had been the result of a strange weariness of all his other friends who

could not be taken for granted as understanding, without elaborate foreword and explanation, all these present chaotic conditions of Germans and semi-Germans. . . .

"Come out," David suggested. "It's stuffy in here, and I want to take a parcel of books round to—to some people quite near. . . . You can help me carry 'em."

In the hall Nell and Samson Phillips were talking in an earnest whisper. Nell wore heavy golden furs flopping over her thick brown outdoor coat, and a wide-brimmed golden hat. She was a very decorative figure in all shades from sallow through ivory to rich umber; her thick skin, the cream-dusky colour of honeysuckle, could certainly never flush to any shade of pink; only when she was moved, her eyes glowed deeper. They glowed now, at the sight of the two boys descending the staircase.

"Oh, Richard, where is Deb this afternoon? She said something about coming here?"

"Did she? I believe she's gone to that Russian singing woman, La llorraine. Anyway, you're going out, aren't you?"

"Yes. Oh yes. Antonia Verity has invited me to a picture-show. I'm waiting for her to call for me. But I thought if Deb came . . . but it doesn't matter——" She glanced swiftly corner-wise at Samson Phillips, and her look said plainly "I'm sorry." . . . Then Mr Redbury came out of the smoking-room into the hall.

"Vell, yong beople"—he beamed approval on Nell and Phillips—"I like to see yong beople enchoying zemselves togezzer. How is your fazer, Marcus? Vun doesn't see much of him lately." But he quickly changed the subject, for Ferdinand Marcus was hardly more English than Mr Otto Redbury himself, and therefore at present socially useless as an asset. "Ven are you going to put on ghagi, hein? You're ze same age as David, aren't you?"

"Nearly," said Richard.

"David vos so keen—ah, vell, we can't all be as keen. . . . Vish I vos a poy, and could choin up. Hey, Phillips, vill you take me as a regruit in your rechiment? Vere are you two off to, Nell?"

"Pictures, father."

"To ze bictures? Good. Enchoy yourselves. Look vell after her, Phillips. She's my only girl left, you see."

"Your eldest daughter is living with you for the present, isn't she, Mr Redbury?" enquired the hoped-for son-in-law.

The prospectively bereaved father did not look grateful for the proffered consolation of Hedda. "Run away to ze bictures, yong beople," and prepared to re-enter the smoking-room.

"Pictures, father, not *the* pictures," Nell, explained, speaking as she always did, like a shy but rapid cascade, perpetually dammed. "Miss Verity has invited me—she is fetching me. Not——" She dared not let him continue in the belief that she was to be escorted by Samson.

"Two girls vun vay and two boys anuzzer, and leave an old fogey like me to entertain the Gaptain? No, no, that's a foolish arranchment. Vait for your friend, Nell, and all go to the bictures togezzer."

"Pictures, father. Not *the* pictures. And I'm not sure if Antonia——"

"All be cholly togezzer," her father commanded her, peevish at her second attempt at protest.

"Gom in veneffer you get leave, Phillips. Always velcome. Good-pye, yong Marcus. I hope to see you in ghaki next time;" and went into the smoking-room, irascibly slamming the door after him.

"I'm hanged if I'll be convivial to order," said David. "'Bye, Nell!" he nodded carelessly to Phillips. "Come along, Marcus." On the steps they passed Antonia Verity on her way to fetch Nell.

"Are you waiting for me, Nell? good child!" She rested her calm lingering regard on Samson Phillips, who, stolidly planted against the umbrella-stand, did not budge.

Nell wished she could run away, wished she were dead; anything to be drastically removed from this awful predicament between two people who did not know each other, of one of whom she was still deadly shy, the other commanded by her father to be their escort. . . . What was she to do? How long could they all stand like this glaring at one another? The simple expedient of introducing Samson to Antonia never occurred to Nell, who was very childish for her seventeen years. She just stood with interlocked fingers, suffering. . . . "Perhaps if we wait long enough, Captain Phillips will go away. . . . Is that how things, dreadful things, come to an end?"

III

"Wonder he didn't give me a white feather?" growled Richard, as they walked up the street.

David's eyes were blazing in his thin brown face.

"Hanging on to anything, anybody, English: Beatrice—Con at the Front . . . old Con.—And now he wants Samson Phillips; wants to shove Nell into the fellow's arms. . . . It's so cursedly undignified, this crawling round the feet of a country that stands about with folded arms, not wanting you."

Richard was about to agree, when a peculiar thing happened to him. He was made aware of the Soul of Otto Redbury. . . . He saw it very clearly, small twitching pink nose of a rabbit—not at all unlike the Soul of Gottlieb Schnabel, the little baker. Alongside of these two, his own soul was an instant laid, then snatched away again . . . queer company for the soul of Richard Marcus; he found Redbury objectionable, and despised Schnabel, but—he understood. Funny that David, who was supposed to be an imaginative womanish creature, thrilling quickly to response, a nature artistic and intuitive and all that sort of thing, should reveal himself in certain cases so hard and blunt.

Richard said slowly: "It's such a beastly position for all of them—all of us," he amended; but it still seemed a grotesque nightmare that he should be one of the band whom he was unwillingly compelled to understand and defend.

"It's all very well to be down on your pater, Redbury, and of course one rags about the change of names, and Swiss waiters and so on—but it's so utterly unnatural to have no country when your country is the one thing in all the world that matters. As good patriots as any are drifting about loose with nowhere to dump their load of patriotism. Oh, I know the stock argument—they should have stuck to the place where they were born. Well, a few thousands, a few tens of thousands haven't done so; it's no good pretending that it was as important before nineteen-fourteen as now."

"I suppose the English didn't overflow and get stranded on No Man's Land in such numbers, because they could always colonize," David conjectured.

"And now this war; we scramble for cover. And the safe people who have settled for generations in one place, of one country, of unmixed blood, laugh at us for scuttling. Do they

ever think how easy it is—no merit, but, God ! how easy, to be born in England, wholly English, when they say of the half and half brigade : ' Let 'em get back to their own country—we don't want 'em ! ' ? But they might have said that before 1914, to have given them a chance to get back. They can't get back now. Their own so-called country doesn't want 'em either. . . . Won't have them ; calls them renegades, who have severed all ties, all obligations. And there they are, absolutely helpless between the two. Belonging to both—no—belonging to neither. Can claim protection from neither. They're frightened, I tell you, David. All this frantic jabber of the Hidden Hand—why, there have been practically no cases where the naturalized German has been proved guilty of plotting against England in the interests of the Hun. One or two, perhaps, among thousands. But rejected by Germany, rejected by England, dashed from one to the other—how can they help all those little acts that revolt you as being ridiculous or—what do you call it ? undignified—ostentatiously planking down their names on subscription lists, kow-towing to the English servants, change of name, and pretending to be Dutch, and pitiful swanking of their English friends ; even grabbing at Samson Phillips to get him in the family at all costs.—All that isn't treachery, but ordinary childish human funk."

" Why, at the worst, what can be done to them ? "

" Nothing very bad. Nothing at all compared with what the men at the Front have to go through ; think I don't know that ? " Richard questioned fiercely. " And yet they wouldn't be funking if they belonged to a country, and had a united cause to fight for. It's not being able to shout with the rest. It's the bitter desolation, nowadays, of fighting for one's own hand. . . ."

He became aware of David's slow quizzical smile.

" The miracle of the Sleeping Beauty awakened," he commented softly. " If nothing else, the Great War has at least done this for one Richard Marcus. Rather a drastic kiss, but astoundingly effective."

" Shut up ! " Richard kicked at a stone in the roadway. Head bent, hands clenched in his pockets—as if he *wanted* to think. As if he welcomed this disconcerting upheaval of his imagination . . . to be able to understand Otto Redbury—what next ? To stick up for a lot of rotten Germans—Marcus of Winborough, champion half-back of the footer team—

Greville Dunne's pal—average at his work, but a decent ordinary all-round fellow, and no end keen on a commission in the R.F.C. Never again, for him. Never again. Something had happened. . . . Richard walked along savagely mourning for the self that had once fitted him so easily. . . . Never again!

David noticed his dejection—and amusement softened into something resembling tenderness for this strong bull-necked fellow, helpless in the grip of his first individual problem. It must have been a bad shock so to have galvanized him from matter-of-course unthinking acceptance of a scheme of life which had been hitherto fair enough and good enough . . . tread of many feet all marching in the same direction . . . and now—No Man's Land.

There was little for David himself to learn about the by-ways and customs of this nebulous territory—from his earliest childhood he had wandered there. And he realized that it was not to the habitual thinkers that the war and what it involved had made such a shattering difference—but to those who had never thought before. . . . Poor old Richard . . . all those tumbled we's and they's of his utterance . . . he hardly knew yet where he belonged—too doggedly proud to include himself with the nation who did not want him—yet jibbing at classification with the despised alien enemy. Poor old Richard, it was rather a shame.

"At anyrate, we're both in the same boat," David exclaimed, carried away by a quick impulse to solace. Immediately his companion, in a manner of speaking, toppled him out of the boat.

"No, we're not. You're born over here. You're all right. You'd be English if you weren't a pro-German."

"Damn it! I'm *not* a pro-German. I'm a Jew."

"What the——" Richard in his astonishment stopped dead on the pavement.

"Well?"

"What has being a Jew got to do with it? It's a question of nationality, not religion."

"The Jews *are* a nation. If it were only a theological difference, why should that have affected such a very marked distinction of feature and temperament? Going to Synagogue instead of to Church doesn't alter the curve of a nose. Of course we're a nation apart, apart and scattered—but racially

the most united in the world. And that's another of my private reasons for wearing khaki—because the English have been good to the Jews, have given them sanctuary and treated them as equals. They have a claim on our services. While Germany has always behaved like a swine to Judea. . . . I'm *not* a pro-German, Marcus, but there's a kinship between English Jews and German Jews and Russian Jews and Italian and American and Polish and Roumanian and Austrian Jews, that no war ever waged can entirely destroy. I don't want to see a Jew hurt—and, oh God! I don't want to hurt another Jew. We're a race of artists and financiers and wanderers—not of fighters."

"I don't know about that. Jehovah was a God of din and battle, wasn't He? I'm a bit foggy about the Old Testament, but I seem to remember that they were always at it, hammer and tongs. And pater says that Jews are ardent patriots by temperament."

"Yes—with nowhere to put it. All countries, and no countries, and the countries from which we've been driven, and the countries where we hope to go back. . . . I'm sorry we can't change over, you and I, Richard. The feeling of persecution isn't new to me. . . . I've got the sense of it in my very bones. . . . I've been hounded with my ancestors from the East through Russia . . . through Central Europe. . . ."

"Good Lord," Richard broke in; "I believe you *enjoy* feeling like that."

And David laughed: "I believe I do. It's our heritage—this succulent style of melancholy, like seaweed swelling richly under water, compared with which all other sorrow is like seaweed, hard and stale and crackly, on the dry sand."

"Can't say that either is my style. I just get damned sick about things. I'm damned sick at not being able to join up in the Flying Corps."

"You're only a semi-Jew, Marcus, in spite of the rich promise of your face."

"I *am* only a semi-Jew; my mother was a Christian. And what's wrong with my face?" Richard demanded truculently. "I say—where are you taking me?" as David swerved into a narrow street of tall dingy-looking buildings.

"It's all right. I just want to bring them these books." He ran up some steps of a house with the "To Let" board forlornly plastering the windows; and as the bell dangled broken

from its socket, and no knocker was in evidence, banged with his fist on the panels of the front door.

"Rum," thought Richard.

A tall, heavy-featured girl opened the door, and in silence led them to an unfurnished room littered with books and packing-cases and piles of tinned food. A babble of tongues struck harshly upon the ear. . . . For a second's space of time Richard was walking up the wide twilit streets of Dorzheim—a dado of pines lowering blackly on the horizon—crowds brushing past, chattering—noisy guttural chatter from the pavements and cafés. . . . "You will see how many take off their hats to me. . . ."

"This is my pal," Redbury explained carelessly to the room at large. "He's one of us——"

All Richard's being uprose in a growl of contradiction. "One of us?" Why, these people were Germans—talking German, the whole gang of them—about eight or nine. . . . If he had been a tom-cat, he would have stiffened his fur and spat. As it was, he responded churlishly to salutations, and retired to a window-seat in the corner, from there to watch from beneath humped eyebrows the mysterious proceedings of these friends of David.

The atmosphere oppressed him with memory of all the rumours circulated about German spies . . . German Secret Service. . . . England honeycombed with treachery. . . . What were they doing, in this empty house, talking German with the passionate zest of tongues let loose from hours of irksome restraint? . . . What was in those tins and cases? . . . . How had they got hold of the German newspapers and pamphlets lying about? . . . One of the group was reading aloud a German letter now, and all listened tensely, some still kneeling on the dusty boards with their arms full of books—all except David and the heavy-looking girl and a boy with a flowing tie and thick lips and incredibly close shaven head, who were engrossed in some private discussion. . . . The girl produced a pile of music and their heads bent closer over the score.

Confounded insolence this, in the very heart of London! Richard's mood wavered from indignation to a queer sort of panic at being thus associated. He wondered if he ought to give information? No, he could hardly do that, brought here in all good faith by David. But even supposing that these people were bent on no actual harm—and commonsense

asserted that they were merely packing hampers for the German prisoners, and at the same time enjoying a little licence of their native speech—even then, how dared David suppose that he was "One of us" among these—these Huns. Not a fibre of kinship in him stretched to meet them. He was as utterly an alien here as . . .

As he had been at Winborough, this last term.

A sudden ache asserted itself for Greville Dunne's grey eyes looking straight from under the rim of his midshipman's cap; for Greville's English voice, and divine lack of understanding for all things save what was usual and fitting a young Britisher of eighteen should understand; ache for Mrs Dunne and for the Dunnes' cottage home in Kent—for Molly's tom-boy exuberance, and young Frank dashing into the chintz sitting-room with his toboggan.

Only of course they would be blank to the badgering perplexities which David Rothenburg——

In an effort to escape from the linked chain of thought, Richard took up a journal lying on the ground near his feet. It was a month-old copy of the *Tageblatt*. In little separate squares outlined in black were the names of those who had fallen in action: "Thomas Spalding—Gefallen, 14ten Juni 1915." . . . What was this palpable English name doing among the list of German officers? Thomas Spalding? Richard speculated idly on the anomaly, till fancy quickened to realization that this Thomas Spalding was his own equivalent on the other side—over there a boy of English parentage brought up in Germany, enlisted in the German army, with his sympathies . . . where? Over here, Richard Marcus, of German parentage, brought up in England—Ah well, Thomas Spalding had more luck than he. They had taken him in the army and he had been killed in action. Nevertheless, who knows what he may have had to endure first, from taunts and coldness and suspicion, outcast emotions pushed this way and that. Inevitably the lot of those who are not entirely sons of the soil on which they fight . . . die . . . "Thomas Spalding, Gefallen." . . . Richard stared at the brief announcement till a sting of tears rushed to his eyes. He wished he could have had just one talk, one grip of the hand with his unknown comrade, suddenly nearer and more vivid to him than either Greville or David.

You and I, Thomas Spalding. . . .

CHAPTER III

I

Samson Phillips was first and foremost a man of tenacious disposition. He heard Antonia mention that Deb was to be found that Saturday afternoon with a certain person of the name of Ilorraine, and that she intended a visit to the same person, on her way home after the picture-show. Therefore, by doggedly attaching himself to Nell and her friend during the picture-show, as he was well able to do after Otto's admonition to conviviality ; by dint of an afternoon's complete boredom and stiff discomfort; and by steadfast repetition of "Well—where do we go now?" at every projected flight on the part of Antonia and Nell, when circumstances offered a break in the concerted programme, as outside the Redburys front door, or after the complete and lingering tour of the Leicester Galleries: "No, I don't care much for this kind of picture." Or after half an hour spent in some neighbouring and drearily respectable tea-rooms ; in fact, by simple dint of "hanging on," Samson presently found himself being welcomed by La Ilorraine, after the manner of a Royal Mistress of the Robes receiving the Royal Master of the Staghounds. . . . She was in one of her "legitimate" moods ; wit and not coarseness was the passport for innuendo. They had rented a rambling underground flat off Elgin Avenue, where their furniture had at last a chance to spread itself ; the vast drawing-room, lit by candelabra night and day, was thick-carpeted and sparsely furnished by a Louis couch and chair, a piano, and a table that held some delicate simpering miniatures. Manon moved about the dim spaces, a solitary unchildlike little princess with wide skirts and golden hair that was brushed high off her forehead and piled into stiff curls. . . . Obviously, the more disreputable phase of peroxide, clothes-line, and variety entertainment, was for the moment in abeyance.

Samson awkwardly approached Deb and Cliffe Kennedy, who were talking together by the window.

"Good afternoon, Miss Marcus."

"You? How funny!" Deb began to laugh.

Samson *was* funny, in juxtaposition with La Ilorraine and Cliffe Kennedy. He was so unplastic.

"Who brought you here? Antonia?"

"I came to see Miss Verity home."

"But she has only just come."

He held to his point. She would some time or other be obliged to make a departure, and then his services as an escort would naturally be required. A girl should not traverse the dark streets unaccompanied. A girl should be aware of perils besetting her, though ignorant of their nature.

Samson enquired how Deb proposed to reach home. "This is the worst end of Elgin Avenue," he hinted darkly, and looked with suspicion at Cliffe Kennedy, who passed his hand across his eyes as though brushing away a hideous memory, and said abruptly: "I've never spoken to you of my little sister—have I?"

Deb knew that he was an only child. But she also knew by now his marvellous talent for fitting every subject that came up with local interest of personal experience. What she did not know was exactly how real was the momentary belief which inflated his account of the lovely and cherished little sister—Beth, her name—whom Cliffe had once been requisitioned to fetch from an evening party. There had been a woman—he had not gone. "Someone else will see the Babe home." . . . Beth, tired of delay, having refused all other escort—"I'm waiting for my brother, thanks," with childlike pride—had at last started off by herself. . . .

"It was months before we gave up the search. And it killed my mother—spiritually," Cliffe amended, recollecting that Deb had frequently lunched with Mrs Kennedy. "Her hair went snow-white during those months——" mournful eyes fixed on Samson's aghast, attentive face. His gaze wandered to Deb's, read there a gentle reminder of the dear old lady's almost unpowdered dark brown coronal; and without the slightest perceptible break in the narrative, sank his voice to the supplementary explanation: "Yes—she dyed it for my sake. I simply couldn't bear it. My fault—damnable ego-ridden slothful beast!—and the perpetual sight of that piled-up silveriness never let me forget for a moment what she had suffered—what we all suffered . . . she guessed it was driving

me to madness—Other women condemned what she did—called it preposterous vanity . . . at her age. God! one of the divinest impulses of pure love——"

By now, Cliffe was so swathed about in self-spun illusion of tender maternal sacrifice and a lost little sister, that Samson may have been pardoned for horrified credulity:

"And you never heard anything—no news—no clue——?"

"I spend regularly four nights a week in brothels," Cliffe replied with exquisite simplicity—and Samson checked a stern protest at use of a word which, after all, Deb could not possibly understand.

"But I'm making you melancholy with all this. A chance word reminded me—I'll see you home to-night, Deb; but I hope you're not relying on me to pay your bus-fares; you still seem to cling to the outworn tradition that gentlemen, beautiful glossy eligible gentlemen who live in Kensington Palace Gardens, always pay the fare of the young lady they're walking-out with—or rather riding-out with. I've noticed a semi-diffident, semi-expectant look that you always direct towards me when the conductor comes round, and you pull out your modest little purse—and I'm hypnotically compelled to the low rapid pained yet masterful and at the same time unobtrusive utterance: 'No—please—allow me—I insist.' . . . And I can't afford it, Deb. I'll see you home to-night, but you must pay your own fares."

Samson favoured the speaker with a look so expressive of the "beautiful glossy eligible gentleman who lived in Kensington Palace Gardens" that Deb's eyes, encountering Kennedy's, were an elves' dance of green and grey merriment.

"I will accompany Miss Marcus home, if she allows me."

"Are you pledged to see Nell home as well? Antonia and Nell and I all live in different directions, you know."

"David Redbury is calling for his sister." Samson stationed himself in an uncomfortable attitude beside the lounging intimate pair, and remained there unbudgingly on guard, declining to be drawn into their conversation; nor yet to be beguiled away by any inducement of refreshment or music.

Meanwhile, La llorraine was making Nell welcome.

"My dee-urr, you are *that* friend I have been wanting always for my Manon . . . she grows too old, too staid—She is with me and the Countess and Stella Marcus and Mrs Verity—she

hears us talk—it is not always well that she should hear us talk. The Countess has a most tragic business on the carpet, my dee-urr . . . wait, I will tell you—or when we have more time, perhaps. But my Manon—you shall see her every day—all day—so she will grow a child again—healthy, romping children, you and she. . . . You can eat your déjeuner here, and she her dinner with you—ideal !—it shall be planned . . . for listen : " She sank her voice to the confidential pitch, holding Nell inexorably captive with one hand, and with the other sweeping wide descriptive circles. " At present she muses too much of marriage and what it brings. She sleeps badly. She put me questions—*soch* questions . . . . Wait, I will tell you my plans. . . . *That marriage*, when it koms—ah, it will be somesing ! superb ! you see. But it is essential she shall be fresh and unconscious and blooming. . . . Those girls, Antonia, Deb, they are no more early-morning, . . . They dream not . . . they laugh at love. My dee-urr, it vos vonderful you should been brought here for my Manon !

" Now tell me, my dee-urr, are you trobbled inside about *that* question of a hosband ? Or your mother ? "

" I don't know . . . I mean—I haven't any. . . ." And then, from the midst of confusion, Nell pushed out a courageous : " I think it's horrid to talk about husbands and that sort of thing."

La llorraine was switched off at the main. And Antonia, overhearing, smiled at Nell encouragingly. She and Deb agreed that it took weeks of hard labour to pierce young Nell's creamy layers of impenetrability. As one put out a tamer's hand, swiftly her fugitive spirit darted away, in a tremor of shadows and dreams ; thoughts that frightened her, so like couchant, half-slumbering beasts they seemed. Sweeter thoughts that slipped from chill grey to silvery sheen—aspen-leaves stirred by a wind from nowhere, and hushed again. It amused Antonia not a little that La llorraine should in public and within the first five minutes of meeting, demand an outburst of articulate confidence on the subject of Nell's troubled inside on *that* question of a husband.

Nell and Manon, swept imperiously together by the opera-singer's enthusiasm, and expected to begin romping without delay, eyed each other in furtive dislike . . . till Manon's demure sang-froid relieved the situation.

" Would you like to see my canary ? "

"No," said Nell, in a passion of pity for the artificial life any bird must lead, in that hectic twilight atmosphere.

After a pause Manon tried again. "The young man who has just entered the drawing-room has beautiful eyes. Do you not think so?"

"He's my brother David. And he's only a boy. He's the youngest of us."

Her prospective friend shrugged plump shoulders semi-bare in her quaint early Victorian frock. "Too young for me, bien entendu. Doubtless he will be infatuated with Mama. The men of her age who visit her, take no notice of Mama, comme femme, you understand, but try always to play with me. And they pretend it is as a child that they make a pet of me, and I pretend too, and Mama. But we all know it is not so," she nodded wisely. Certainly, if Nell were to attempt the task of preserving Manon's early-morning dreaminess, here was an excellent opportunity to start. Instead, she sped across the room to David; pulled imperiously, desperately at his arm. "David, I'm ready to go home with you. Quite ready."

But David was not to be beguiled. He had found in La llorraine what had been so poignantly missing from his life since the outbreak of war. He had re-found his Continent. She embodied all the thraldom of a tour abroad; all the lost delights he had described to Richard. Her looks, her voice, her setting, her clothes and perfume even; the outflung movements of her long white ringed hands, her bits of richly suggestive reminiscences, with ejaculations given in all languages. Sudden familiarities; her exhaustive and professional acquaintance with foreign music, foreign artists and their very questionable careers; of foreign cities—their opera-houses and their royalties; gossip, garlic-spiced and succulent, or else melodramatic and sonorous—her whole attitude towards life, towards the *ingénue*, towards David himself——

He vowed afterwards to Antonia, in ecstatic gratitude for her share in bringing him hither, that never again while he had the freedom of the flat near Elgin Avenue, would he fret at island limitations. "She's simply incredible. When she talks, I can smell hot coffee and those jolly bright brown lengths of bread that one plunged for at the buffet, arriving at Boulogne or Dieppe. . . ."

"I'm glad you're happy, at least. My other two intro-

ductions to the party look simply sodden with misery. I think we must be unselfish, and get them away."

She indicated Nell and Samson, the former still being entertained by Manon ; the other, an obstinate misfit in the company of Deb and Kennedy.

Antonia Verity was Cliffe's only fixed territory ; his spiritual headquarters. He returned to Antonia after all his zig-zagging spurts of enthusiasm. But Deb was his present caprice. He took Deb with him everywhere ; displayed her proudly to such fragments of his circle as were handy ; told her all the stories of all his loves ; telephoned her before and after meals ; wrote her long and blasphemously witty letters, or postcards that were the scandal of Montagu Hall ; made her free of his home and his books and his mother, teased her and argued with her and shocked her and bullied her and—did not make love to her.

It was an enervating existence—for Deb. There was a peculiarly flattering quality to Cliffe Kennedy's absorption in her, even in its impermanence. Other queens had reigned . . . other queens would reign.

She was not in the least infatuated by Kennedy, in spite of occasional efforts to believe this the cause of the diffused glamour on all her days and nights. His personality was not quite that of a real man . . . it was a vivid tricky personality—wantonly elusive—wantonly exacting. He had to be forgiven half a hundred lapses of manners—even of humanity—per instant. He was a veritable lob of mischief-making, untrustworthy, with not even that one point of reliable consistency of being a law unto himself. No one could ever hope to pin him down to any statement or opinion. Yet, with these traits, there was nothing womanish about Cliffe Kennedy. His tastes were masculine ; his language forcible ; his brain elastic but brilliant. Other men—ordinary men—liked and sought his company, while deploring his fantastic appearance, the leathery spider-webbed face and the two bits of blue inset with the vividly light effect of a chimney-sweeper's eyes among the soot ; his abandonment of yellow hair ; his wild sad thin legs that were like that kind of poem which having no end or beginning, straggles on and on in various shapeless forms of incoherence. It was a pity, with those legs, that he should favour so strongly the tweed knickerbocker style of clothing. He would have been better suited by a jester's motley of red and yellow, or a

picturesque costume of fluttering rags and slouch hat and knotted staff. He resembled that sort of concentrated allegory in pedestrian form which a few years ago meandered variously through novel and drama as the Wanderer, the Pilgrim, the Minstrel, the Fiddler, the Vagabond, the Gypsy, the Tramp, the Pedlar, the Just-Outsider, the Never-Coming-Quite-in-er. He was the vanguard of that type with which Deb was presently to become so familiar—the young male of the transition period, who, perhaps in self-defence, rose to match the half-and-half girl; young male who required neither extreme of mistress nor wife, but accepted, in a spiritual sense only, the semi-privileges accorded him—the licence of speech confidential or witty; and temporary rights of appropriation—by an unspoken avowal that he might be trusted in all situations not to transgress limits; but in return it must be clearly understood that he was on his guard against the responsibilities of wedlock:

"Shouldn't we be miserable together, Deb?" And she wondered what reply etiquette dictated to this ardent declaration of no-marriage in the various forms it was offered her. "Please, I wasn't even trying . . ." occurred to her as the likeliest.

Amongst the tricks of this twentieth-century style of liaison was a totally unembarrassed delight in hoodwinking such of the older generation who still took propinquity at its face value, to the belief that the two concerned were indeed formally engaged; wantonly depositing raw material for scandal, where it would be easiest picked up by the person for whom intended.

Cliffe was enchanted when Deb reported to him grandfather's indelicate enquiries *re* that young Kennedy's prospects and declarations; or sentimental Trudchen Redbury's eagerness to discover when congratulations might be allowed to cast off their decent veilings, and appear on the doorstep in the form of a large basket of flowers, white and pink. He even insisted on propping up all such suspicion by escorting Deb to a formal Sunday afternoon call at the Redburys. "Und nun," Trudchen babbled to her husband, as Cliffe's decorous top-hat passed up the street in devoted juxtaposition with Deb's best white fox furs—"it may at any moment . . . how happy the dear Stella will be!"

Ferdie and Stella, true to resolve, put no direct questions to Deb. The child was enjoying herself . . . she was always

out—that affirmed enjoyment. Stella was as rapacious of Deb's conquests as though her own sterile girlhood were thus being avenged. . . . A gleam of triumph shot from her narrow dark eyes in the direction of Hermann Marcus, as Deb indifferently thwarted his industrious research. Here, at all events, the despot had no powers of destruction. Ferdie's lenience rose from different motives. He prided himself on his lack of insistence that each succeeding episode should result in an eventual son-in-law. Plenty of time—plenty of time. His little Deb was flirting . . . only natural! The younger generation governed themselves by new laws; how unlawful these laws Ferdie was happily ignorant. According to him, if "it did not come off," then either one of the pair was indifferent to the other's love, or else they were "just good friends, nothing more"—no reason why a man and a girl should not be comrades, in these enlightened days. But that any working arrangement could exist whereby passion was deliberately and even verbally harnessed with comradeship, and held in check, and given rein, and expelled again—no, that certainly never occurred to Ferdie Marcus. His outlook was just half a generation ahead of his own; half a generation behind his daughter's. Deb, in a sort of wilful despair at her vain search for control and supervision either from the authority she would have been quick enough to defy, or by some innermost spiritual compass she lacked, Deb went where she pleased, in what company she pleased, at what hours she pleased; rubbed her spirit in pioneer literature, pioneer drama and pioneer discussion, till it was mournfully sterile of glamour or amazement; and for some inexplicable reason, played up to all assumptions on the part of the Studio gang, that she was even as they were in experience of sin . . . only it was not the fashion to call it sin, except when the term was used humorously. Not one of them, girl or man, would have believed Deb, had she chosen suddenly to discard her pose of sophistication. She had experimented just enough for this—no more. Her passionate little face, poised on its thick column of neck; the heavy lids that were never quite drawn back from her eyes; slow-smiling mouth, the rich blood veiled by skin crinkled and transparent as poppy-petals in the sun-rays; above all, a quality in each supple movement she made, which a dancer once defined as "limb-consciousness"—combined to uphold the lie that vanity in her had started.

"What can it matter—my life is my own affair!" thus Deb, who hoped hers was a wayward soul, and knew it was merely slipshod. . . .

What *can* it matter?—why, nothing had mattered much since she had kissed Burton Ames . . . and he had been called away to the telephone. She had broken bounds then . . . entered on forbidden country. Of what avail afterwards to turn and crawl tamely back through the gap, resume an existence where girls did not cheapen themselves?

If he had made it worth while . . . he had not made it worth while, or worth anything. One had heard of girls who, disappointed in love, had flung themselves headlong "to the bad." Deb did not do that. She merely meandered badwards; her steps, like those of a very intricate dance, advancing and retreating with sideway darts and curvetings and inexplicable rushes for cover and sudden boldnesses . . . all the haphazard effect, to an onlooker, of a dance without the accompanying inspiration of music. But the onlooker could not have guessed that Deb had seen Jenny die with all the eagerness of her being unfulfilled, baulked. . . .

"I never knew it was so easy to die—while one still wanted things as much. One must take—take—and take quickly!"

She was wont to tell Cliffe of her adventures and escapes on Debatable Ground. He listened with proprietary zest, and many oaths of secrecy. And then betrayed her to Antonia or Zoe or Timothy—whomever the object of his next momentary death-or-nothing spasm of intimacy. Deb, following after, cleared up the litter of her character, agreed with Antonia or Zoe or Timothy that Cliffe was simply impossible and deserved to be forthwith discarded . . . and then went off with him for the week-end to his country cottage near Wycombe.

No—that was how Kennedy himself would have described the incident. As a matter of fact she went with him for the Saturday, as she had often done before, and they were to return in time for supper at Zoe's flat, where Deb had arranged to stay for what was left of the night, because it was easier just to roll over on to the sofa in the sitting-room, than to worry about busses or trains to South Kensington. She was shedding the fundamental home-instinct that the black hours must necessarily be spent in one's bedroom with all accompanying accessories of property. Really, once the sacred custom was

broken, one could tumble to sleep anywhere ; at an inn, or on a divan with two or three other girls, or—in hot weather—out of doors. . . . Yes, she had grown lax over the geography of her nights. It was easy enough to 'phone Aunt Stella and say : " I'm staying with so-and-so till to-morrow." " Very well, child—have a good time." Stella supposed that so-and-so had a spare bedroom, and could lend Deb a nightgown. Gradually Deb trained them not to worry even if she omitted to 'phone her whereabouts ; a 'phone was not always handy—" You'll know I'm all right."

And all this—for nothing at all. The girl's behaviour, submitted to the essential interrogation, was as orthodox as her circumstances might be the reverse. That night at Seaview for instance—the sea was entirely a matter of fiction, but Cliffe insisted that such a name must shed a disguise of Philistine respectability over any dwelling. It was not even the dramatically inevitable outcome of a swiftly discovered passion setting them aflame and beyond all reason and remembrance ; or else to be explained by a set of automatic coincidences, such as misunderstanding with the rest of the party, or a faulty time-table or a fog. Certainly it was raining rather drearily ; and Cliffe declared that the prospect of Zoe and her surrounding aura of Soho waiters and impresarios and macaroni-merchants rendered him faint with boredom . . . and they were having rather a jolly talk about something-or-other . . . and there was plenty of cold-stuff supper in the larder. . . . And Deb was in a sort of fancy dress—she had discarded her wet and muddy tweed skirt for a pair of white knickers of Cliffe's, which, with her own loose red-bordered white serge sailor smock, gave her the look of a trim and dashing principal boy in pantomime. She disliked the bother of resuming her skirt again.

" Oh, well, let's stop on here," said Cliffe impatiently. " Why do I pay a high rent if not to be able to talk quietly with a pal now and then, without interruption ? "

" Five-and-six a week, isn't it ? " Deb indolently let lapse the question of their imminent return.

" Six-and-six. And cheap at that."

" I suppose the baby-farm next door reduces the price. They do seem to make more noise than ordinary home-babies."

Cliffe grinned. " The landlord tried to argue that out as a

special convenience . . . 'So handy just to drop it over the wall!'"

"When you first mentioned your country cottage to me, Cliffe, I pictured it with a thatched roof and an orchard and roses round the door."

"'Make me love mother more'" he hummed. "Curious psychological effect some vegetation seems to have! But what a hopelessly conventional imagination is yours, Deborah. Is it likely I'd be found dead in one of those old-fashioned traps for sentiment and earwigs? Seaview is a futurist conception of what a country cottage ought to be, in its stark, splendid ugliness."

Seaview was a yellow-brick workman's house, standing in a row with five others of the same build . . . bare of ornamentation, and with the straight road to High Wycombe directly outside the door.

Deb balanced one bare tan leg across the knee of the other, clasped her slim ankle caressingly, and dangled a caked and clammy stocking near the fire, which, with the reckless squandering of much paraffin, Cliffe had at last wheedled to a ruddy pyramid.

"I wish you hadn't tramped me through all the sploshiest fields, Cliffe."

"'Where there are cows there is dung!'—simple Russian proverb," he replied sententiously. "I'm compiling a book of them. Besides, you shouldn't have forgotten your umbrella."

"I've never had an umbrella. . . . Think of it—never a little umbrella of my own—and sometimes my arms are empty—oh, so empty. . . . I have to watch other women dandling their umbrellas . . . and wonder why such happiness should have been denied just to me. Sometimes, at night, I dream that I have, after all, one dear little golden-headed umbrella . . . and then I wake up to find it all a dream—all a dream——perhaps I shall never have an umbrella now . . ." Mournfully she wriggled her toes down into the foot of her stocking.

He watched her from his sprawling posture on the horsehair sofa, and smiled. . . .

"Highly improper conversations. . . . Wonder if Samson Phillips would approve of it? Does he still write you those compromising letters about running brooks and Ella Wheeler Wilcox?"

"Every Friday. EllaWheelerWilcox sounds like an oath, the way you say it."

He swung himself upright, striking the pillow-sausage with his fist. "It *is* an oath. Yes, I might have been a good man if some confiding aunt hadn't roused my worst passions by a gift of those eleven white, innocent-looking vellum volumes. . . . 'And they were wed on a horsehair bed, and the dying day was their priest.' Deb, would Samson Phillips consider the dying day an adequate priest for you and me?"

"I'll ask him if you like. I'm a privileged person with Samson; he used to kiss-in-the-ring with me at children's parties—a very serious young man unbending to play with the little ones—and acquired a taste for me that way."

Cliffe hummed:

> "Now that you're married we wish you joy
> First a girl and then a boy—
> Seven years after comes son and daughter—
> Come, young couple, and kiss one another."

He repeated the last line softly . . . and a funny little smile pranced at the corners of his mouth. "Is the game old-fashioned, Deb, for present company? Here you are, hopelessly compromised—entirely at my mercy——"

She shook her head. "Much too old-fashioned!" but was nevertheless not quite sure how far the jocund spirit held sway. . . . There was an element of primitive commonplace in man which baffled all her utmost powers of histrionics—and she knew it; expecting its most unexpected appearances. When the invariable happened, she had hitherto been able to cope with it in all its forms so triumphantly as to surprise even herself—using alternatively the weapons of pure wonderment, appeal to good comradeship, elfin irony, pathos of reminiscence. . . . So far, she had had better luck than she deserved. But each averted peril left her a little wearier of wayside incident, a little more restless for the good thing which brought rest.

And now—Cliffe. Or was it merely her fancy that his eyes threatened? Even Cliffe, whose apparent happy sexlessness had been a subject of such absorbing debate between herself and Antonia and Zoe. Cliffe—even Cliffe—God's understudy, who brought lovers together for his whimsy and parted them for caprice; and whom no girl of them had caught in lover mood himself—Even Cliffe—but he was a stranger to her now,

as they all were, the friendliest, when this thing touched to life some fundamental antagonism.

"Behind the times, am I? Well, try the new way, then. Advanced theory, and all that. . . . We don't love each other, but let us experiment in life's stuff. We may . . . please each other without loving. Why not? The Youth of to-day refuses to squander itself in unsubstantial dreamings. Here am I—here are you—brilliant young intellectuals. Eugenics—and all that! Likewise, we are quite crudely frank about our respective pasts; and render it fully clear that we have no intention of making claims on sentiment or responsibility beyond the present hour. And I am cynically epigrammatic about marriage, and you are fairly amusing about chastity. And then, let me see—yes—then we become serious and rather subtle; introspective psychology—passion and its effect on the individual temperament.—God! deliver me from this modern fashion of erotic promiscuity masquerading as Repertory Ethics! Give me instead the old-fashioned blackguard and the out-of-date village maiden—and they'll play me a decenter scene than ever achieved by all this twentieth-century tangle-talk. Deb—I know a man and a girl who consented to humour the State and get married for no better reason than because they had saved up the price of a divorce, to put in the bank—a sort of emergency exit. And they asked me to admire their hideous sanity. 'We'll take each other for better,' the man sniggered—'but why insist that two human beings should take each other for worse?' smug fool—as though his beastly Marriage on a Reasonable Basis were worth while, anticipating dreariness and weariness and satiety. To go in for it gallantly, with hope and a ray of idealism—that's marriage on a reasonable basis. But this fellow asked me to *admire* him. . . ."

"Now, I wonder what you said to him to dispel that illusion?" Deb was quite serene and comfortable again now that Cliffe was making speeches. He could be reckoned to go on for hours, his out-thrust chin propped on his clenched fists. She suspected he might be equally wrathful and eloquent had he chosen to hold forth in defence instead of in condemnation of his subject. But still . . .

"People think, because there's a war on, it ought to reduce the human psychology to a state of beautiful rustic Big Simplicity. . . . 'We have no time for minute dissections of idea in these times when——' Idiots! Windbags! As if war

itself—now—were a beautiful rustic simple Big thing. Everything's complex to a verge of lunacy—it's the tendency of evolution—war and peace and character and morality—The war hasn't made a halfpenny-worth of difference—only a khaki embrace gives a fictitious impression of bluff manliness. . . . Complexity is raging everywhere beneath the surface layer of uniform, just the same—just the same. We're all victims to it—you, Deb, and I, Deb. And the immediate tormenting question of me and you . . . we don't love each other, do we ? You who know too much and have done too little ?—do we ? "

He rose to his gaunt height, and pressed his large hands on her shoulders, and stood looking down upon her . . . she wriggled a trifle uneasily. There was monotony in this procession of negative wooings, and she would have welcomed a change. It might perhaps have been possible to care for Cliffe—if he had not damped her ardour by presupposing the contrary. If he had made love to her . . . love, like the threshold of a dim yet familiar garden fresh with the night-breath of drenched petals——

And instead they were ruling her round with geometrical lines and angles—theories ! She raised her dragging white eyelids and looked up at him with an intimate appeal for the garden . . . the garden back again. . . .

His face grew suddenly stern.

" Go up to bed, child—I'm going for a walk on the Common——"

But he did not remove his hands—till, swooping, he kissed her gently on the forehead. And strode abruptly out of the front door into the dark dripping road.

An uncanny familiarity about his action . . . a detached feeling of having once been the spectator—then Deb remembered. She had seen Cliffe treat Antonia in exactly the same way. It was his celebrated Kiss of Renunciation, as performed before all the Crowned Heads of Europe. . . .

CHAPTER IV

I

"WHY didn't you turn up last night?" demanded Zoe Dene-Cresswell, stepping in and out of her tiny kitchen in a whirlwind effort to prepare dinner for Pinto, keep "Quelle Vie," the King Charles spaniel, from the sitting-room cushions, entertain Antonia Verity with an account of her latest incredible adventure, and illustrate how she would play her new part for the Andrea Film Co. There was some reason—connected with the King Charles, or perhaps with keeping the draught from the stove, or was it an amorous Italian gas-fitter who was not to know she was at home?—which rendered it imperative that doors should be perpetually opened and shut as she dashed from room to room; and as there were more doors than sanity could find reason for in the fourth floor flat in Soho, Deb was inhospitably received by a gale of three separate slams, and was compelled to make an informal entrance through the bedroom. All the rooms led into one another, like a flat in farce; and, like a flat in farce, the frequent cupboard doors were constructed sufficiently like the others to trap a headlong fugitive into enforced concealment; and most parts of the wall disconcertingly flew open at a touch.

"It's all right, Zoe—only Deb," Antonia called into the kitchen.

"What did you do with Cliffe last night?" Zoe piped shrilly. "Such a perfectly awful thing happened here—I must tell you——"

"We stayed on at Seaview, and only came up this morning—down, Quelle Vie!—Zoe, she's eating the radishes!"

"Shove her into the bathroom," indistinctly from Zoe, enveloped in a cloud of steam. "My dear, a simply awful thing—I was just telling Antonia——"

"Here, you bulgy-eyed little brute——"

With a squeal Zoe darted out of the kitchen mists and stopped Deb and the spaniel at the very threshold of the bathroom.

" Come away—I forgot. Benvenuto's in there—little Carlo from the 'Napoli'—you know. He's having a bath."

" Why ? "

" How should I know why ?—he looked fairly all right from the top—but the poor little fellow begged me with the tears in his eyes—he hasn't got one in his flat—and they're so particular at the Napoli—I couldn't refuse him, could I, Deb ? He might lose his job. Besides, he's such a little gentleman at heart—listen to him splashing so that he shouldn't have to hear what I'm saying ? I like that, don't you, Deb ? It shows nice feeling. And of course, he couldn't lock the door because it doesn't lock. You might have walked right in and how would he have felt then ? The landlord never left me the key, and I can't ask him for special favours because he's so crazy about me he might take advantage—common little sand-worm —I was just telling Antonia——"

" I would hardly call it a special favour to ask for the key of your bathroom door." Antonia's voice, soft and amused, dropped like cool respite into Zoe's loud insistent gabble.

Zoe's conversational ability was a Juggernaut to her friends ; it rolled on and on, destroying in its eternal passage those rash victims who hurled themselves beneath the wheels. Nothing could stop its course, not night nor anguish, nor the kettle boiling over, nor the tailor's family doing murder on the landing below. It could not be ignored, nor suffered as accompaniment to other deeds. It claimed hypnotized attention, and by a perpetual insertion of " didn't I ? " " well, don't you agree ? " " What do you think ? " exacted response, and exacting, passed over and crushed it.

And yet she was such a jolly little person, with a wide-eyed tip-tilted air of a seraphim just introduced into the Café Royal and anxious to get the hang of the place ; tumbled silvery curls ; and sleeves now rolled up to show a plump allure of forearm and elbow.

" Pinto is coming to supper, we've got to make up a quarrel, which means that he'll throw the furniture about, especially if his crab salad isn't just right, so I simply can't come in and talk to you, girls, but I can hear you quite well, so do go on telling about Cliffe, Deb ; was he almost human ? I mean, did he make love to you ? don't say he did . . . I like having Cliffe about the flat to remind myself that a man exists who can walk, breathe and eat and wash himself quite nicely, like

other men—and yet not want to kiss me. He doesn't, you know —it's so funny, isn't it, Antonia ? It never seems to strike him. I've sat on the arm of his chair and pouted at him, and stroked his head, and told him how lonely and miserable I was, and how Pinto had left me for good and it's so hard for a girl alone, and I've rubbed off all the lip salve because he doesn't like it, and drawn his attention to the fact—and still it doesn't seem to strike him. Sometimes I wonder if something is broken inside him—No, I don't mean 'Wear one of Our Belts and lift the Grand Piano' sort of thing—I meant a kind of moral spring. Because even the post-office man round the corner—it's perfectly awful—he's simply crazy about me, and I don't know what to do, because one must have stamps, mustn't one ? I never dreamt he felt like that about me till yesterday when I went in to phone, and he pretended the penny-box was out of order, and came in to help me, and—well, there I was in the dark alone with him, and he was whispering in one ear about every part of me separately—really appreciative, I must say—and Timothy Fawcett bawling 'Hello' from the other end into my right ear—What was I to do ? I didn't know men were like that, did you, Deb ? "

"There was no marked change for the worse in Cliffe's behaviour," Deb replied to Zoe's question of ten minutes ago. "In fact, it was depressingly like spending the night with one's great-aunt. He sent me up to bed at a quarter to ten, and then went for a short walk in the rain——"

"Wrestling with his evil passions, I hope—oh, Deb, do say he was wrestling, and that his better self prevailed in the end."

"It must have, because I saw no more of him till he banged at my door with a morning carol, and no hot water. And I didn't know men were like *that*, did you, Zoe ? . . ."

Antonia said: "Cliffe will revise the episode, bind it, and illustrate it, with a preface, and additional notes, and alterations in the original text——"

"Oh, I'm prepared to meet it again, looking like Ophelia dressed by Paquin for the mad-scene. He'll boom it for a fortnight, and then forget it. Cliffe never bothers to prop up his lies, once he's tired of them ; he lets them crawl about and go bad."

"And then sometimes he remembers, and picks them up again in a very enfeebled condition, and coaxes them to take a little nourishment."

"What I want to know," Zoe clattered in with an assortment of plates, knives and forks, "is how much he believes in them himself?"

Antonia expressed her opinion that he believed in them altogether; was possessed of an illimitable imagination which did not timidly boggle at fact or possibility, but soared in ascending spirals of ecstasy to a heaven wherein as he spoke them all things *were*.

"Well, what I say is that it's all very well when he's just creating people that don't exist, to fill a gap in the conversation, or to point a moral, or draw attention to himself. But he's dangerous when he prods about for material about his friends. The things he's said about *me*. . . ."

"Oh, *you*, Zoe!" Antonia affectionately ruffled the other girl's hair. "You outstep even Cliffe's genius! Have the good people on these premises been warned about the curse you bring?"

For Zoe carried about with her an atmosphere of sensational happenings—police-court happenings. When she moved into new quarters, they were bound presently to be the scene of a murder with some novel attendant features; or a burglary on a particularly large scale; or a police-raid would reveal the premises to be a house of lurid ill-fame; or a criminal would be found taking refuge. . . . And in all these violent happenings, Zoe, wide-eyed as ever and volubly innocent, somehow contrived to take the stage as a central figure; she it was who all unsuspecting had inspired the Polish barrow-vendor with the passion which had aroused his wife's homicidal frenzy; she who had detained the master-burglar—God only knows how!—while the police were being stealthily summoned; she whom the procureuse on the first floor had essayed to tempt into white slavery. . . ." My dear, she thought I was only seventeen and knew *nothing*!" and afterwards testified the same to a genial and admiring magistrate; she in whose flat the criminal was discovered in hiding—"poor fellow—you simply should have seen how he looked at me!"

So, like a Banshee visiting a parvenu Irish family who didn't even know they had one, Zoe was now dwelling above a gradation of Jewish tailors—a tailor and his family to each floor—all in feud with one another. Cliffe Kennedy foretold an imminent pogrom as being novel and appropriate to her present surroundings. Zoe's subsequent description of events

were always a delight to her audiences—and to herself; for though she pretended to extreme indignation at her victimage, yet no doubt but that her vanity was elated at being so conspicuously selected for the limelight.

It was during these narratives, animated by a complete pantomime of imitation, that a quality in Zoe which usually puzzled by its intangibility was washed broadly to the surface —a quality of eighteenth-century coarse heartiness, a fleshy stridency recalling the pictures of Hogarth. . . .

Zoe read mostly of the Smollett, Fielding, Richardson and Sterne period. She had an odd liking for Dr Johnson and also for Dan Chaucer. The latter's robust sensuality appealed to her. Though she often aped the loveable baby, she was a shrewd little body, well qualified to look after herself and to deal with her swarming adorers, of whom at least half as many existed in reality as in her rollicking fancy. Competent, too, at cooking and housekeeping—Pinto had seen to that.

Pinto was a bad-tempered and highly respectable Portuguese gentleman of means, who was engaged to marry Zoe. They had been engaged four years already, and although Zoe did not allow his formal proprietorship to interfere with her more enjoyable activities, yet the inexplicable freak of her love for Pinto admitted of no contradiction. He bullied her, and she was abject; he sulked, and she wooed him with succulent dishes; he shouted at her, and she was silent; he had toothache, and she wept. Her life was a perpetual scamper to clear her premises of their illegitimate riff-raff before the arrival of Pinto; for she was essentially "bonne gosse," and could no more have refused one man her kiss, and another her company, than now her bathroom to Benvenuto the oboe-player.

Pinto was not a favourite among Zoe's friends; and hearing that he was momentarily expected, Deb and Antonia rose to go.

"Come any time you like to spend a night here, Deb, to make up for yesterday. I love to have you, and you know the sofa is comfy enough. Antonia, you look such a darling in your khaki, I've half a mind to throw up the movies and become a General's chauffeuse myself. I'm sure the dear old doddery thing would simply adore me, don't you think he would? I could perch on his knee and pull his whiskers when I wasn't driving him to Headquarters. I've really thought lately of

doing war-work, haven't you, Deb? I know someone who said he could get me a job at the Admiralty."

"Heaven forbid!" Antonia cried in horror; "Do remember that as a nation we rely above all on our command of the seas. To have the Admiralty demoralized into Palais Royale burlesque of banging doors and everybody helter-skelter after everybody else. . . . Prove your patriotism and stop where you are, Zoe! it's safer. And I won't have my Major-General tampered with either," she added demurely; "He's not much over forty and very good-looking."

Zoe sighed: "You are lucky; there's nothing you couldn't do with that irresistible peak to your cap. . . . But I really should be sorry to chuck up the part I'm rehearsing; it's a tremendously fascinating plot, and so simple. I must tell you: The boyish hero Jim falls in love with Dolores, a wild Spanish-gipsy sort of woman much older than he is, and marries her. She gets tired of him, and runs away with something débonair called Raoul, and they have a child, and Dolores dies. Seventeen years later Jim meets the child and adopts her and loves her and marries her—and *she* gets tired of him, and runs away with something débonair called Réné, and *they* have a child, and then get killed in a circus. Years later Jim meets the child and adopts her, loves her and marries her, and *she* gets tired of him, . . . it goes on like that for generations, until dear old Jim gets a little silver-powdery at the temples, but even that doesn't seem to stop him. I play the child each time."

"And always the same Jim? The film ought to be called 'The Recurring Decimal,'" laughed Deb. "We must go and see it when it comes on. 'Bye, Zoe, I hear Pinto's step on the ground-floor, and Benvenuto's bath-water running away."

Zoe flew to smother the incriminating oboe-player; and Deb, and Antonia departed. On the dark stairs they encountered Pinto, puffing noisily, and carrying a large jar of olives.

II

"She will be pleased with the olives," Pinto complacently informed himself. Then he tripped over a basin of some peculiarly odorous fish soaking in water, which the First Tailor's children had left on the landing. His temper changed.

"She will be overjoyed—it may be she thought I had left

her for always. Now I return and I bring her olives. It is good of me. . . ."

Zoe did not care for olives, but Pinto had overlooked this fact. He happened to have a taste for them himself. . . .

A black figure shot past him and downstairs as though discharged from a catapult. It was Benvenuto the oboe-player.

On the next landing, the children of the Second Tailor came out and drove a hoop at Pinto's legs, under the impression that he was a kind gentleman. He disabused them of the notion, and scowling heavily and panting more than ever, toiled on. It was deepest ingratitude on the part of Zoe to live on the fourth floor.

The children of the Third Tailor merely blocked his way, snuffling heavily. Their sombre eyes and unspoken speech was that of Maeterlinckian drama: "We have seen him before. . . ." "We have seen him a great many times. . . ." "He is seeking the princess in the tower-room. . . ." "What is that he holds in his hand—I cannot tell—it is so dark. . . ." "Hush—draw closer. . . ."

Pinto had now reached the topmost flat, and handing Zoe the olives, coldly awaited her answering burst of enthusiasm. Unfortunately he had so often reprimanded her for displays of undue effervescence, that Zoe limited her gratitude to a meek "Thank you very much, Pinto."

Pinto was aggrieved. He shrugged his shoulders—demanded his dinner; reproved Zoe for having her sleeves tucked up—("You look like an ill-bred cook!")—commented unfavourably on the sort of household which lacked a corkscrew—("When I take trouble to bring you a jar of olives!")—and finally broke the news that he was going to Paris on business for a month.

Zoe, smarting under the charge of a lack of feeling, flung herself into Pinto's arms, wailing aloud her grief; he was horribly jarred by her piteous want of control, but shutting his eyes, suffered it uncomplainingly for a moment; then condescendingly pulled her ear, and remarked that he expected her behaviour during his absence to be circumspect, discreet and loyal.

Zoe promised.

III

"Coming home with me for dinner, Deb?"

"Yes. Antonia——"

"Well?" They had walked along in silence for a little while, after quitting Zoe's flat.

"You're thinking that I ought not to have stayed down at Seaview with Cliffe."

"Why should you suppose I'm a prig who can't mind her own business, Deb?"

"There was no harm in it," Deb pleaded, as though Antonia had condemned her.

"That's just it"—slowly. Then: "No, Deb, don't make me—please——"

"I know. I know. The same whatever I do. No harm in it, but you wouldn't have done it yourself."

"Not with Cliffe."

Deb assented in anxious self-defence: "One might as well be staying under the roof of a nice old lady."

"Then—is it worth breaking the rules for—that?"

"You believe in rules. I don't. I'm a rebel."

"Half a rebel. Or you wouldn't be justifying yourself quite so hotly."

"And you're wholly a saint!" Deb flared, rather unreasonably, as she had pushed the other girl to attack.

"Because I don't stay under the roof of nice old ladies? It's futile. When two people care like Gillian and Theo——" she stopped short, as though she had not meant to let slip the names.

"I'm always hearing of Gillian and Theo. Are they married?"

"No. Theo Pandos has got a wife somewhere. He's a Greek. Clever—but a cad."

"And Gillian Sherwood is a celebrity, isn't she?"

"In her own line she's supposed to be unique. Bacteriology. . . . She did a rather wonderful piece of research, and all the hoary professors of science and medicine bent before her and kowtowed. It's a shame she should squander herself on Theo, just as it's a shame——" Passionately she renewed her attack on Deb: "You've betrayed us all. . . . Cliffe will suppose that any girl—I—I *hate* him to think so. Why can't you run away from them—instead of towards them?"

"I don't," whispered Deb piteously. "I stop where I am."

"Then—*run*!" with an imperious stamp of the strapped and booted foot. "You little Oriental!"

"As if they were our natural enemies? perpetual hunters? It seems so silly and self-conscious." Nevertheless she recognized Antonia's spirit poised for flight, and applauded it—the spirit of a juvenile athlete. . . . It really had been a proceeding rather without purpose, to remain at Seaview. Antonia never did things without purpose. "I love you in gauntlets and puttees, Antonia."

The General's chaffeuse laughed at the flattery. "By the way, did Zoe say Timothy had been 'phoning her?"

"Little Tim Fawcett? Yes, I believe she mentioned him—it was rather swamped in a lurid story about a post-office clerk."

"Take on Timothy—yes, you. I'm not keen on Zoe's influence there. He's such a serious baby, and he'll idealize her."

"He might also idealize me. Besides, I'm not going to 'take on' anybody. You've just been bullying me about it. My soul henceforth shall pace apart among narrow aisles of lilies——"

"Tiger-lilies?"

They were at the door of the house in St John's Wood now. The maid admitted them, and Antonia, passing her, called out: "Come straight through into the studio, Deb."

"Please, Miss Antonia, Miss Sherwood is there, waiting for you."

"Gillian!" Antonia stopped short. She looked at the maid—then at Deb. A variety of baffling expressions flitted across her face. . . . "Has she been there long?"

"Oh yes, Miss, nearly an hour." The maid disappeared.

"I'm so glad—I wanted to meet her." Deb was frankly eager for the long-deferred encounter . . . but Antonia was behaving strangely; standing rigid and immobile, her slender eyebrows contracted as in some desperate effort to rally a final expedient against fate. With a little sigh she let her clenched hands fall open in surrender. . . .

"Come along," and moved towards the passage which led down the garden towards the studio.

The large sky-lit spaces were empty. A scrawled note lay on the box of oil-tubes: "Sorry—couldn't wait any longer. Come on Tuesday evening if you can. G.M.S." Antonia read

aloud. The suspended colour had flooded back to her face drowning it in carmine. She crumpled the paper into a ball and flung it towards the waste-paper basket. Her aim just missed.

"Take off your hat, Deb," she cried cheerfully.

"Let's see the celebrity's handwriting." Deb picked up Gillian's note and read: "Sorry, couldn't wait any longer. Come on Tuesday evening if you can, and bring Deb Marcus. Cliffe says I'd like her. G.M.S."

"Antonia!"

"Yes?" Antonia's back was turned. She was apparently absorbed in scraping a palette.

"Why did you—Antonia, I want to know Gillian Sherwood. Why won't you let me?"

"And the good angel and the bad shall fight together for this man's soul," murmured Antonia. Then she dropped the palette, and faced round, all her delicate pearliness broken up to passion—the passion of the earnest priestess for a convert in danger: "Yes, you're right, Deb—I *have* been working to keep you and Gillian apart, now, and before now, and I've not given in yet. Accident has backed me up this time."

"But why? Antonia—why? Not just jealousy?"

"No, child—not just jealousy. But Gillian Sherwood is on her way to do what you must be prevented from doing. And I don't trust her influence. If Jill cares for Theo, and gives herself to Theo—it's a splendid person thrown away, but not frittered away. But you," scornfully, "you'd be all over the place—once you started. You shan't start."

Again Deb asked "Why?"

Antonia flashed her a smile which was a radiant appeal to good comradeship: "Because . . . you're such a little goose!"

CHAPTER V

CLIFFE KENNEDY, entering the Tube at Charing Cross, caught sight of Mr Otto Redbury between the bobbing hats and swaying bodies that crowded up the carriage ; and immediately pushed his way to a strap which directly overhung that gentleman's head.

Cliffe always asserted that on the occasion Deb took him to call, he had discovered a tricky fascination about Mr Redbury ; this was clearly an opportunity to refresh the emotion.

Otto waved the evening paper at him, in jubilant greeting.

" Anozzer vamous fictory ! "

" The little grandchild Wilhelmine has made the phrase immortal," murmured Cliffe. " How lucky for her that she rhymed with village green."

Otto looked uneasy ; not comprehending the reference, but wishing that somebody had informed the young man that the Redbury grandchild was better referred to in public as Minnie. He changed the subject.

" You live somevere on zis line, Mr Gennedy ? I get out at Pelzize Bark."

" Oooo . . . nice ! " gurgled Cliffe. Otto looked interrogative.

Cliffe serenely covered his lapse from manners. " Hampstead is my station. Our house is on the Heath itself. You must come and make friends with my mother, Mr Redbury. She'd like you so much. Come to lunch one day. Come on Saturday."

Mr Redbury beamed and puffed out his meagre chest, anticipating the conquest of Mrs Kennedy. This was undoubtedly a very pleasant and discriminating young man. . . . " but I always vind blenty in gommon viz English people—the good old shtock ; "—sentiment reserved for the after benefit of Trudchen ; and to impress Beatrice.

" Yoo-stone ! " bawled the guard. A number of passengers squeezed their way out ; and Cliffe dropped lightly on to the vacated seat beside Otto.

" My dear mother's a widow, so don't bring your wife. She was deeply attached to my poor father, and can't bear the sight of any woman less fortunate in a husband alive."

Otto, groping after what was complimentary in this outburst, came to the conclusion that the clang of the gates had obliterated its part meaning.

" Besides," Cliffe ran on, in a rapid confidential undertone, " why be for ever bound by the conventions ?—Look at all the jaded joyless faces——" A rubicund Jack Tar opposite grinned broadly, thrust his tongue in his cheek, his arm round his girl beside him, and rolled an expressive eye in Cliffe's direction. " The day's routine, and the jolting train, and a dreary little home in Camden Town, and the evening paper, and another day—and another, and yet another. . . . What those faces want, Mr Redbury, and I see you agree with me, is Paganism—joie de vivre—a gallop with the centaurs ! "

His companion, who would have turned peevish and retired into his bathroom stronghold at the very first encounter with a centaur, nodded sagely. . . .

" O glorious Life ! " rhapsodized Cliffe, stretching forth his arms, oblivious of his neighbours' discomfort and astonishment.

" Wass-vot ? who vere you viz last night ? " chuckled Otto, his eyes mere slits of lewd curiosity.

" Last night . . . last night . . ." ecstatically—then came an imperceptible halt, as Cliffe discarded a comparatively innocent evening spent at home with Philip Gibbs' " Soul of the War," in favour of his almost equally harmless adventure with Deb at Seaview the week-end before. This would serve, touched up with scarlet and purple ; it was additionally spiced by the reflection of how Otto's whetted tongue would loll out, metaphorically speaking, if he knew that the heroine of this presented drama of Real Life as it isn't, was Deb Marcus, his late partner's daughter, and a friend of his own daughter Nell.

" Two of us—and the great scented common rolling away from our doors to a star-stabbed sky. Two of us—for when the little Dryad so long immersed in the oak-tree of tradition, sprang out at last into my arms, her hair wildly ablow, and with lips red as blood, then all the pettier issues of the Philistines were trampled, I say trampled, Mr Redbury, under the wings which sprang godlike from our exultant shoulder blades ! . . . (Oh God ! what a sentence ! . . .)"

" Camden Town ! "

The morbidly interested school-girl on Cliffe's left was reluctant to alight—but that happened to be her station, and she dared not be late for supper.

Otto, as the train gathered speed again, turned to Cliffe expectantly, as a hint that confidences might be resumed. Of course he disapproved of these casual rollicking nights spent unchaperoned save by the rolling common . . . disapproved and was biliously envious: but—but—his look was akin to a nudge in the ribs—and Kennedy, always obliging, discarded poetic eloquence in favour of the one-dog-to-another style obviously more suited to the temperament of Mr Redbury. He was thoroughly enjoying his own pose of the young-Bohemian type he most abominated in practice.

"You know how it is——" was sufficient to sound the new note of waggishness. "You've heard the old joke about hanging pictures, Mr Redbury—I bet you have——"

"Ho! ho! ho!" from Otto.

"We were—hanging pictures . . . and missed the train home—the last train but one——"

"And the last drain of all vent too late, eh?"

"Well—there it is, you see—you can't bring a girl home at any hour—especially if her father's at all particular—as fathers sometimes are—as fathers sometimes are, Mr Redbury."

And Otto chuckled and winked and coughed and cleared his throat, and settled his cuffs, and chuckled again, as though the lives of Hedda and Nell were never rendered a burden to them by the paternal injunction: "Home by nine o'clock, and bed at ten"—and interposed a swaggering if somewhat laboured anecdote of his own secret unorthodoxy—"We dake it for granted this is between you and me, yong vellow!"

"Belsipark!" The doors flew ajar.

Cliffe replied with a corresponding drop into gravity: "I trust equally in your discretion regarding the confidence I have placed in you, Mr Redbury——"

". . . Of course he'll prattle—but I mentioned no names," as Otto, trotting up the platform towards the exit, cast through the window of the compartment a look of unutterable fraternity and knowingness.

CHAPTER VI

I

OCTOBER brought Samson Phillips to town for six weeks of special signalling instruction. Quite suddenly, from lethargic standing about in the vicinity of Deb, as he had done since her kiss-in-the-ring days, some unseen goad prodded him into courtship. The old-fashioned word exactly expressed the flavour of his proceedings. Perhaps he was afraid she would sink too deeply into the mire of Bohemianism, as exemplified by La llorraine and Cliffe Kennedy, in whose company he had found her on his previous leave. At all events, without quite knowing how it came about, Deb perceived the handsome sapper to be a prominent factor in her daily life. He rang her up on the 'phone regularly every morning, and was alternately facetious or reproachfully tender in claiming her day for the theatre, or a jaunt in the country, or dinner with his people. The play or the restaurant was always selected by him with due care for her innocence and not her preference. He loaded her with gifts that were a compromise between the generosity of an Eastern potentate in the wooing of a rapacious slave-girl, and such restraint as decorum demands before an engagement be a sealed fact: books of poetry, principally Spencer's "Faerie Queene," flowers, chocolates, crystallized fruits—gloves . . . he was not *quite* sure about the gloves, and consulted his sister Beatrice, who said she thought a slight touch of unconventionality might be pleasing to Deb;—and war-trophies, which of course were "different."

The Phillips men always conducted a courtship with their entire family rolling up behind them, wave after wave, and ready with a hearty benison instantly the signal for readiness should be given. A man with honest intentions need make no secret of them, Samson sturdily contended. Not only the Phillips' mother and grandparents and sisters and three younger brothers with their wives, but also, by virtue of Beatrice's marriage, the whole Redbury family assisted at the pretty spectacle of

a dark-haired Jewish maiden wooed and won by a son of the same tribe. Deb told Antonia it was like being courted in the Arena at Olympia on a day when thrown open to the general public. Her set also were amused, though less ostentatiously, by the progress of the affair ; it was of a species new to them, and Zoe and Cliffe, in particular, were clamorous for details ; puzzled that Deb withheld these. For in spite of her exasperation with the Phillips *en masse*, she was loyal enough Jewess to protect her own clan from the levity of the Gentile. She confided in Antonia ; Antonia knew when to control mere ribaldry ; and to consider Samson as a human being, instead of an entertainment.

The whole wooing was not so incongruous to Deb's temperament as the Studio Gang believed it. They made no account of her fundamental racial instincts responsive to just such a reaction from truancy, nor to the first twenty years of her life, spent in an atmosphere where Samson's methods would have seemed wholly normal and pleasing. The incongruity only appeared when contrasted with more recent imprints on her development. These were responsible for her first careless acceptance of Samson's appropriation ; she forgot, until too deeply committed for withdrawal, that his actions and her acquiescence were here expressive of more ponderous significance than in the case of Cliffe Kennedy, for instance. She forgot, in fact, at the outset of the event, that the Samsons of this world do not lend themselves to wayside incident.

Apprehension faintly stirred in her only when she saw escape everywhere blocked, by the solemnly joyful expectation of Samson's mother and grandparents who had so long and patiently waited for the eldest son to make his choice ; by the already-one-of-the-family chaff of his younger brothers and their wives (Samson shorn of his strength by Delilah was a recurringly favourite joke with them) ; by her own folly in having yielded whenever he petitioned for her company ; mainly, by Samson's propensity to propose to her in the form of an arithmetical allegory in which Cliffe Kennedy hazily figured—" Supposing one Man were to have known one Girl for sixteen years, and she had known another Man for three and a half months, while the first Man was away ; and the first Man came home again for six weeks, how long ought he to wait before taking the Girl to drink from the Singing Stream ? "

The Singing Stream was not a public-house. It was Samson's

way of alluding to pure love. He was obsessed by the notion that if you take a girl to the water, she cannot help but be freshened and purified by mere sight of its freshness and purity.

Bohemia to him meant dancing and carnival and riot in hot studios ; it meant glaring lights and stifling air and glittering evening dress. All the nineteenth-century rigmarole : the flash, and gleam of bare limbs ; the dark hectic red of spilt wine ; exotic music, and the stage, and doubtful witticisms and free love—free love as opposed to *real* love. It was his fixed idea that literally to remove Deb from the fetid atmosphere and take her to where a stream babbled and gurgled and splashed over the stones and between green banks, was then and there bound to react upon her system in the way that he so desired.

It did not take Deb long to perceive his motive for these day-long jaunts into the country ; and mischief urged her to play up ; to dabble her fingers among the slippery shallows—it was fortunately a warm October—and to sigh . . . once or twice . . . and murmur " I wish——" and be wistfully silent again . . . and dabble a bit more . . . was quite sufficient to make Samson preen himself, owning the stream, her thoughts, the crude blue sky, and the entire healing balm of Nature. He wished her to be convinced of her folly in lingering to gaze at Vanity Fair, when she might have been weaving willow garlands. It was inconceivable that she had done more than gaze with childish long-lashed eyes . . . not knowing what she saw. . . .

As though in complete sympathy with the cause of reform, running water seemed to follow him about automatically. Whatever haphazard portion of country they rambled, the persistent brook appeared like an obedient servant on command. Deb began to wish her education were completed ; the weather might any day turn chill and dreary. With this in mind, she perched upon a couple of rickety boards which roughly bridged a sparkle of narrow river, and shamelessly determined to put forth her powers to exact forthwith the inevitable proposal, and thus be through with it.

She had not the same compunction in dealing with Samson Phillips that might have wrung her had he been the good-natured, faithful type of fool she had at first imagined him. The man had revealed himself a fanatic, whose gospel was Simple Goodness ; but who in preaching it materialized its intangible fragrance as of garnered apples, into a quality of cold iron ; forbidding, repellant. High-principled he certainly

was, but intolerantly throned and totally without forgiveness. He would have made martyrs where he could not make converts. He destroyed Simple Goodness, in his harsh advocacy, as he had destroyed the beauty of running water, by letting it serve as object-lesson.

On this berry and bronze morning of October, Deb opposed to him a dancing elfin mood that was far more nimbly in accord with the tags of fluttering colour blown from the trees into the eddies of writhing silver, with the jolly boisterous hedges, all aflame and a-prickle, a blaze of hips and haws webbed in the powdery tangle of old-man's-beard—Deb was more wickedly and wantonly a part of such a morning as this, kicking her legs to and fro from the plank which spanned the water, than Samson with all his most complacent hopes for her betterment and cure could have deemed possible.

"This is how I like to see you looking," he said, lying full length on the bank, and smiling lazily across at her. "Come, now, isn't it better than studios?"

"Supposing a girl should marry a man"—("and I don't see why he shouldn't do some mathematics for a change," reflected Deb)—"Supposing a girl should marry a man, and the man had different tastes from the girl, about studios and nature, you know, and they had two children——" Samson turned his head away, and nibbled grass—"and both had the same tastes as either one of the parents, ought the other to give up his or her own feelings about things or force them on the children, supposing he or she to be sure his or her ways were the best?"

And she waited solemnly for him to work it out.

He won respect by neither flinching nor compromising. "A man should never allow his children to be brought up away from Nature, whatever they may want themselves."

"Yes"—straddling the plank so as to face him—"but *isn't* what they want themselves, Nature? And if it isn't natural for them to want Nature——"

"Then they are unnatural children," said Samson, stamping with firm boots on his mythical offspring.

Deb's eyes suddenly filled with tears. Fancy had quickened into momentary life a pair of baby creatures like herself, eager for bright, useless toys, perversely breaking them at each fresh disappointment . . . *her* children, pressed and wrenched into the pattern their inflexible father judged best for them. . . .

The might-have-been faded, and was replaced by an exultant

sense of escape. Thank God, these children—hers and Samson's —need never live and be sorrowful; thank God, she was still free to scamper away and play.

"Deb——" he pulled the peak of his cap down over his eyes; and his words were pumped out with extreme difficulty. "Deb, will you marry me?"

"No—oh, no"—reaction was still too violent to admit of polite temporizing.

A long silence while Samson assimilated her refusal. An interminable silence. Was he wondering what his family would say? They were in such a crucial condition of expectancy that he would have to tell them when he got home—the telling would not be easy. . . . Deb rebelliously tried to jerk pity aside; it was his own fault. The right sort of man would have been decently uncommunicative till his desire was an accomplished fact; so typically Jewish to drag in the entire household! Or else he should have chosen a maiden more suitable to be the object of his benevolent chivalry. She had not deliberately hoodwinked him into belief that she was this maiden, so unlettered in life as his obstinacy chose to assert. The accordion stretches or shrinks according to the player. She hummed a tag of verse:

> "He made a plaster image and he put it on a shelf
> With a few assorted virtues that he didn't want himself."

—Outburst of romping spirits muted quickly at recollection of the figure lying motionless and with back turned towards her. . . . He was the only man who had ever spoken the actual words to her: "Will you marry me?" Funny! Years ago, before they quarrelled, she and Con were canoeing in a sort of hazy dreamland when it was taken for granted between them that they would canoe thus into all eternity; and the other men. . . . What on earth had led Samson to such a mistake in selection? From the outside, of course, she appeared to have most of the requisites: same faith, decent family, right age (a year or two older than perfection, perhaps, but nothing to fuss about!) good looks, good health, good manners—the presence of his mother had always petrified her into gentle orthodoxy . . . but surely, surely, he must have sensed behind these layers, something wrong—Well, not exactly wrong, but *different*. Perhaps he did realize it now, and was relieved . . . he hardly looked relieved—furtively

her eyes peeped towards him, and then quickly away again . . . an almost stricken expression to his recumbent lines. Surely she could not be responsible for that? What possible thread of affinity was taut and silken between her and Samson that any act of her could reach him and hurt him? He should have been sensible—Deb kicked petulantly at a low bough near her foot—the suitable kind of girl would have accepted him joyfully; would be nestling her head against his shoulder by now; causing him to feel so strong and brave and protective; and he could have taken her home, and proudly trumpeted his engagement, and the united family could have poured out lavish blessings . . . quite wonderful, in its Suitable way, this Suitable dream; she could see that; only it did not fit her, or else she did not fit it . . . a dream going begging!

Still silent? Another glimmering look from between her lashes, two black fans, long in the centre, dwindling at either corner. He must be *badly* hurt . . . grace touched her to penitence again. After all, he had wanted just her—so there must be a particle of her very self, apart from all misconception, which had tugged him to love and to pain.

Yes—but can't he look after himself? Need I? need I? No one looked after me when the Soldier. . . . Need one be nice to grown-up men? Because even when it's only a boy—even when it's Lothar von Relling, nobody understands that you're just "trying to be nice." . . . She had been waiting over a year for a little heavenly approbation for that act. Nevertheless, she ought to have said something softening in answer to Samson's avowal, besides the bald and honest: "Oh no" . . . Manners!—What *did* one say? "Believe me, Sir, I am deeply sensible of the honour you have done me, though all unworthy of it,"—Deb could not suppress a joyous gurgle of laughter—she was free—free—light of heel and of heart. No more arithmetical allegories; nor deriving of solid moral benefit from the sight of running water; nor suffocation under the possessive approval of a good Jewish family; nor quaking in apprehension of the proposal to come. She was free to return to the set of wild young heretics who knew her as she was—or a little worse—in place of these others who thought her so much better, and to whom her real self would have been a mystifying disaster.

Samson stirred at the sound of her laugh. "Come along, we shall miss our train," he said curtly. The peak of his cap stood between them all the way home. To avoid being alone

with her, he chose a crowded compartment for their journey home, and completed it in a motor omnibus, instead of a taxi-cab according to custom. Deb submitted meekly, feeling as though she were being punished for naughtiness. It was her nature to cling affectionately even to unpleasant conditions, directly they had established any claims of habit; so that it was with a pang of kindliness that from the steps of Montagu Hall she saw Samson salute her and stride away:

"And now I shall never see him again!"

II

She saw him again three evenings afterwards. His mother wrote, cordially bidding her to dinner. Deb, with every inclination to behave like a coward and refuse, yet felt it incumbent upon her to "face the music." . . . She had eaten at the Phillips' table every day and sometimes twice a day, for a fortnight. But she could not help considering the invitation a mistake in tactics—What more could they want of her, now?

She consulted Richard: "D'you think I need go? It'll be like a funeral. I feel I ought to bring a wreath."

"Sure you don't want him?" asked Richard gravely.

"No—no—no. I should have to go to Synagogue, and dine with the whole family at Mrs Phillips' every single night—they never seem, any of them, to dine at their own houses. And have a Visitors' Day. And do good works; not good work, but good works. And never read anything except the Faerie Queene and Rosa Nouchette Carey, and the newspaper leaders. And give up all my pals, because they're a bad lot. And be accountable to a man for my freaks.'

"Well—that's just being married, isn't it?"

"It's just being married to Samson Phillips—and that's being married three times thick. I say—I do believe you're in favour of it."

Richard said he did not want to force her inclinations. He was perfectly serious about it; these lapses overtook him at times.

She curled her arms round the balustrade post—their conversation took place at the foot of the Montagu Hall main staircase—and put her chin down on her arms and said: "Dear old boy, I warn you that you and father and Aunt Stella would be taken over by the Phillips family-life, and be absorbed

like ink into blotting-paper. I daresay grandfather would manage to stand out. . . ."

"He's a Major in the Sappers, isn't he?"

"Samson? No, only Captain. Why?"

"Nothing. . . . I mean the family are known to be tremendously patriotic and all that sort of thing, aren't they?"

"I suppose so. Rotting apart, Richard, d'you think I need go to-night?"

"Yes, I do."

So Deb went, a shy, prim creature in flowered silk and fichu; all her troll mood of October dried into apprehension of spending three awful hours in the awful company of an awful family hating her because she had flouted it. More than ever did she quake at the sound of her unnecessarily loud and nervous peal at the bell, and wished that the Phillips would conduct their love affairs in solo, and not in the bulk.

By the end of dinner, she was, metaphorically, rubbing her eyes and wondering if she had dreamt the whole matter of Samson's proposal and her rejection of it. The cicatrice of her infliction showed not a trace on the smooth firm skin of the Phillips' complacency. The Phillips' grandparents still made a fuss of the dear little girl, such a well-mannered little girl, and (in brackets) our Samson's little girl. Mrs Phillips and Beatrice still included her in all their plans, and consulted her with pleasant humorous allowance for her immaturity. While Herbert and Abe, the two younger brothers—Joseph was at the Front—and their wives Martha and Gwendolen—Florence was not yet allowed to be up more than an hour a day, although little Fanny was a miraculously good baby—continued their chaff as though the situation were at exactly the same stage as last time Deb had dined there. Abe even made reference to the threadbare matter of Delilah and clipped locks. . . .

Only Samson was imperceptibly more silent than usual; but he was never talkative. "Can't he have told them?" but of course he had told them. They were probably informed beforehand of the exact hour he had meant to propose. Then . . . what was the psychology of their present behaviour? Deb was helpless, rebellious, wholly perplexed, and disliking her company more than ever before, because she had imagined she was definitely rid of it; that she would never again sit amongst flashes of white teeth—they were a handsome healthy family and had married handsome healthy girls—and hear the curiously

robust conversation about Florence and her baby. When a married pair was in question, they knew no reticence ; it was right and seemly that open discussion should take place, even in the presence of a young girl ; no harm at all—had not Abe and Florence been enjoined in the Synagogue, within hearing of all, to wax fruitful ? . . . But all jokes concerning love unsanctioned by the Rabbi were strictly prohibited by the Phillips' men until they were in smoking-room seclusion. This was their code. The code of the Jewish male.

" I—I *did* say ' no,' didn't I ? I couldn't have said ' yes ' by mistake ? " Deb racked her brains—and recognized with horror that her favourite pudding had been provided—a pudding she hated. She had told Mrs Phillips once that it was her favourite, because that lady was distressing herself over an imaginary poorness of fare ; and ever since then it was carefully ordered for her, and beamingly heaped on to her plate. To-night the necessity for a second helping was worse than ever, because bewilderment had robbed her of appetite, especially for coals of fire.

Once or twice it seemed to her morbidly excited fancy as though the wedding had taken place already—while she was asleep or hypnotized or under drugs—and already she was a Phillips, doomed to dine at this seat at this table in this room for ever and ever, till she was as old as grandmother Phillips ; until she died and all the male Phillips followed her corpse to its cremation, and were reluctant even then to scatter abroad the ashes. . . . " Yes, Mrs Phillips ? " She started from her trance, to find the ladies had risen from their seats, and that she was being markedly beckoned upstairs by a would-be mother-in-law into her bedroom to see the corals purchased for little Fanny.

Deb thought : " It's coming now. . . ."

It came.

The explanation was simple after all : Samson, it appeared, according to his mother, did not understand girls. He had never taken any notice of them—till Deb. He was that sort of man. So when Deb in her first confusion and surprise had stammered " no " to his offer, he had believed she *meant* " no " . . . He had come home in a terrible state—dear silly fellow !—till they had all assured him it was all right, and that he had only to press for a different answer, to get it. . . . " Girls aren't as downright as men," Beatrice had assured

him—"just the plain question, without even taking her hand ?—and then you shut up completely ? Oh, Samson, you old goose—you don't deserve her ! " To which her brother answered gloomily : " How can I take her hand before she has accepted me ? "

" You know, little Deb "—Mrs Phillips wound up her recital, " Samson is so upright——"

Downright . . . and upright . . . yes, all that, but she did not *want* him. How to make these people aware that it was more than maidenly bashfulness which had prompted her to let drop the stupendous good fortune deposited in the palms of her hands.

Duly chastened, she sat quietly on a small pouffe, her head bent, her hands linked in her lap, while Mrs Phillips apologized for Samson's remissness in not urging his suit to triumphant conclusion that afternoon on the bridge ; and betrayed at the same time her stern pride in the rigid sense of honour which had forbidden her son to speak to the girl of his great love for her at the same time as he proposed marriage. " He argued that he didn't want to influence you, dear. So I promised to put that right for him. He's so absurdly chivalrous, that big boy of mine. All his brothers have had their little flirtations. Abe was quite a social success, as I daresay you are aware. But Samson, of course, is the eldest of the four ; *and* his grandmother's favourite ; and that is quite important, as I daresay you know. He always refused to let a girl believe that he meant something serious when he didn't. And I think, my child, that he was secretly waiting for you to grow up."

" I'm twenty-five," whispered Deb inadequately.

" My dear—not really ? I thought you were at least three years younger than that. And you have never been in love until now ? "

How Cliffe Kennedy would have let his hoyden invention romp at this juncture ! But Deb was too aghast at the slow process which was ringing her in, for even the memory of Cliffe —somewhere in the world—to bring comfort.

" I'm not in love with your son," she cried desperately.

" That does not matter at all." Mrs Phillips spoke with unyielding decision. " Samson has a very high ideal of wifehood. He naturally will not require you to love him before you are married."

" Oh ! " gasped Deb. . . . The point of view was discon-

certing ; but Mrs Phillips' apparent certainty of the wedding was worse than disconcerting—it was terrifying ! " I, Deborah, take thee, Samson——" it sounded like two Bible legends badly mixed up. . . . She rallied her forces for another thrust at the Phillips' illusion ; it was perfectly awful to know that it was still there ; that she had done nothing as yet that counted towards damaging it. " Mrs Phillips—*please*—I—I did mean to say 'no.' I'm not worthy of your Samson, indeed I'm not."

The imperturbable dark-skinned surface of Mrs Phillips' face broke into a gleaming smile.

" Now I wonder who's the best judge of that, you or he ? " Then more solemnly : " I assure you, my dear little girl, all that matters is that you should make him happy."

Deb's rebellion shot up to hollyhock height as she reflected : " They take it for granted that he'll make me happy. . . . Oh, but he would, if I were the Suitable Sort. All the hatefulness of refusing him over again. . . ."

" Do you mind, Deborah, if I make a remark on the way you do your hair ? It is, forgive me if I am rude—so very unbecoming. A young girl should always strive to make the best of herself, you know. Beatrice "—as her daughter came in with an enquiring air of is-it-all-right-now—" I was just telling Deborah how we all wish she would change her style of hairdressing."

Mrs Phillips' inflexion of the word " all " crushed Deb back again on to the pouffe, whence she had deprecatingly risen. All . . . she heard the entire Phillips family owning her, re-modelling her, chanting as in chorus : " How we wish Deb would change her style of hairdressing ! "

" Let me try how she looks with it done like mine," exclaimed Beatrice brightly. " May I, Deb—just for fun ? I'm supposed to have a way with hair "—she began to pull out the hairpins. " Oh, what masses—look, mother. I think it's delightfully quaint the way you tuck it under like a boy, but it seems rather a shame that nobody should guess what a quantity you have, doesn't it ? Hardy says a woman's crown of glory is her hair."

" No, Samson said that," Deb corrected dreamily. She knew that Hardy Redbury spoke rarely, but with a certain caustic originality.

" I believe it *was* Samson ! " Beatrice and her mother

exchanged meaning glances of delight. So Deb recognized the utterances of the beloved!

"There—what do you say to that?" and Beatrice stepped back a pace or two while Mrs Phillips hovered round the victim. . . . "A little more off the forehead and ears," she pronounced; "she has such nice little ears; so why not show them?"

Deb, accustomed to the thick tumble of hair to her eyebrows, and its warm cluster round her cheeks, stared aghast at her scalped and naked renaissance in the hand-glass Beatrice held up for her benefit. She might have cried with the famous savage who was asked why he did not feel the stress of the weather upon his person: "*Me all face!*"

"Doesn't she look sweet?" Beatrice cried. And Mrs Phillips assented with less of majesty than usual: "It does indeed make a difference."

"Come down and let Sa——the others see!" Deb was urged to the door and down the stairs, and pushed into the drawing-room, where by now the whole party were assembled.

"How do you like her?"

Truly abashed, head hanging, cheeks a crimson blaze, the girl stood just inside the doorway, while the expected chorus smote her unmuffled hearing:

"Hullo . . . Beatrice at her old games. . . . By Jove, what a change! So she *has* got ears, has she? I often wondered. . . . Greedy little Delilah! all that hair, and then wanting Samson's into the bargain! . . . Turn round—no, slowly. . . . It does suit you, Deb—you must always wear it like that. . . ."

"Do *you* consider it an improvement, Samson?" enquired Samson's mother.

"Yes."

She could feel his eyes upon her—eyes of hot proprietorship—and knew all the sensations of the slave-girl exploited in the market-place for critical appraisement. The veiling had been ripped from large tracts of her person, leaving them bare—bare. . . . Deb, who could be quite happily unembarrassed, even unconscious, when the delicious cream-white slenderness of her limbs was exposed to view, who would not have minded a whit any haphazard spectator of her evening bath, cheek rubbed contentedly against her own satiny damp shoulder, loving the huddled contact, Deb now underwent sheer agony

at the novelty of stark forehead, ears, and nape of the neck. The erection on top of her head felt rickety, top-heavy ; all the separate hairs dragged the wrong way, as hair is prone to do when forced out of its groove ; the Phillips went on exclaiming, suggesting, twisting her about and around, trying the effects of her hat on the new coiffure. . . . And it was not so difficult to refuse Samson when, on the way home, he proposed to her for the second time.

III

" And now I shall never see him again."

A week later came a formal invitation from Mrs Phillips bidding Deb to dinner.

Nightmare . . . and really nightmare, this. One lops off a head and it promptly grows again ; or hits out ever so many times at a malignant beast-face and hits . . . *past* it. And it pushes itself nearer. . . . What was the good of refusing Samson, if something in his temperament was blank to refusals ? And she could not stay away, with the knowledge that in Sussex Gardens the Phillips' illusion was still large and benign and unmutilated . . . illusion that she and Samson were to be married. A smooth, shiny illusion, like a forehead bared of its tumble of fringe. . . .

Something drastic had to be done to it. She would have to accept the invitation to dinner, and sit at that seat at that table in that room . . . and watch the teeth flashing and gleaming . . . hear again the joke about Samson shorn of his strength by Delilah . . . be approved as one of the family by Mrs Phillips . . . and feel Samson's eyes of fanatic proprietorship fixed upon her while she gulped down her favourite pudding. She would have to go, because the worse alternative was to remain in ignorance of just how much she was still engaged to Samson. And perhaps after dinner she would find another way of beating in her cry of freedom upon his unreceptiveness. But she was not very hopeful of this. . . . She was frightened. . . . The Phillips were altogether too much for her.

However, the nightmare did not precisely repeat itself. There was no flash and gleam of white teeth round the table ; but instead long sombre faces ; Samson the centre of commiserating

solicitude. An oppressive atmosphere of reproach directed towards Deb; the second refusal could not be thrown off as lightly as the first. Ultimate results, no doubt, would be the same . . . inconceivable that the eldest son of the tribe should not have the maiden of his choice. But meanwhile the maiden was giving trouble . . . how dared she? Mrs Phillips had much ado to keep the hatred from her eyes every time she brooded down the table at Deb. What better match could she want than Samson? Samson, with his splendid looks, and his grandmother's fortune, and his loyal unwavering affection. The affection of a good Jew who would give her a comfortable home. . . . Obviously the girl was coquetting—testing her power—and making Samson suffer. She deserved to be whipped . . . making Samson suffer. And a mother in such a crisis must control her primitive longings to use force upon stubborn opposition—to take Deb and throw her under Samson's feet—"There—to do what you like with. . . . And now, sleep again and eat again and smile again . . . my son . . . my son. . . ."

Deb understood all this, understood and was passionately sorry for the irritable disappointed heart that craved for Samson's babies to worship as none of the grandchildren had ever yet been worshipped, and cursed her for her perverseness in refusing birth to this small dark-skinned Samson. She wished she did not understand quite so well. Had she been wholly an outsider, she could have dealt her wound, and jigged away. Or had she been wholly in spirit one of these people, then what romance in the prospect of just such a home and babies! But betwixt and between . . . a laughing vagabond soul who could ache in every fibre for the sorrows of a Jewish mother; light flying heels that yet lingered for their owner to look back regretfully on anchorage—a very unsatisfactory blend . . . and, oh, *what* was going to happen after the interminable dinner?

After dinner, a series of weighty manœuvres left Deb alone with Samson in the small boudoir.

"What I want to know—what I feel you ought to tell me—is *why* won't you marry me?" The question lifted itself from his glucose despondency.

Could he be made to see?—"Because—because—oh, Samson, we're so utterly different."

"Is that reason one? Look at Abe and Florence—how

quiet she is, and he's such a lively fellow, and yet they couldn't be happier."

"But they belong to the same world—their code, their creed—and we don't. Quiet and lively is only on top. You think things wrong that I think right, and the other way about."

"There is no such thing as thinking things right or wrong, Deb. They *are* right or wrong."

"Well—there you are!" eagerly. Perhaps by patient wriggling she could twist her way out of this earth-tunnel, instead of by one volcanic eruption. "I'd be frightened to believe that. It's too simple. . . ."

"Well, what do you believe right which I believe wrong?"

She could not tabulate. And remained silent.

"There, you see!" conclusively.

"If you married me," he persisted, "I'd give you every single thing you wanted"—with a mental reservation that his promise naturally did not include the things that were unfit for her.

She twisted in another direction. "You don't like my friends."

"No. They're not *real*, Deb. And you won't like them either when you learn that they're not real. Nothing unwholesome can be real. I don't care how clever they are—I've no respect for cleverness or art——"

"Not the 'Faerie Queene'?" innocently.

"That's wholesome. It has a sound moral. But your Bohemians . . . they're not good. Not good or kind. That's all that matters—goodness and kindness."

"They are," obstreperously. "Bohemians are notoriously kinder-hearted and more generous than Philistines."

The man smiled. "Yes, call me a Philistine. I'm proud of it. But you don't understand, Deb. How much time does an artist give her husband or her children or her home?"

"His temperament needs variety, I suppose."

Samson closed his mouth firmly; he was not going to discuss temperament with Deb, who mercifully did not know what she was talking about.

"I wouldn't let you be dull, little girl, if that's what you're afraid of. We could travel."

"Together or separately?"

He laughed at the joke. "And you wouldn't want to see so much of your *friends* . . . we're a very united family, you know, and Beatrice and Flo and Esther are always together."

A very united family—God, yes !

" So we've disposed of obstacle number one " ; Samson's spirits were rising rapidly. (But how have we disposed of it ? thought Deb.) " Come now, what's obstacle number two ? "

" It's because you're such a united family "—she struggled hard to find expressive words—" that you owe it to them to put the right sort of girl in the spare place. Don't you see, oh, don't you see, Samson, that I should spoil the cantata."

" But they like you tremendously, little girl ; mother and Beatrice are awfully fond of you. And when you get to know Flo and Martha and Gwen——"

" It's no good. I should make you wretched. Oh—*why* do you want . . . just me ? "

" You are the embodiment of the qualities I most admire in a woman."

And he believed it, too. And was unaware that it was some elusive pixie element about the girl—a subtle swing of movement, a freshness thrilling in her voice, some fleeting curving trick of her lip and eyelids, a scornful daintiness which were magic to his manhood, and which would haunt him and escape him, trip up his senses and beckon him on again . . . that it was this which, subconsciously, kept him persistent for just Deb, and no other girl. But he was sincere enough, talking rubbish about embodiment of qualities. This was her pixiness, translated into Samsonese.

Deb sighed. " One would suppose you wanted to be tormented for all the rest of your life."

" In what special ways are you so determined to torment me ? " he teased her.

" Everything can't be drawn up in lists. . . . I should get restless moods, and want to do all sorts of things that you'd think funny or mad or imprudent—or unnecessary, and I should want to do them there and then and at once . . . without thinking them over. And I shall hate being asked questions, and turn sulky over answering them. And I'd go away without you, and forget to write. And ask for a latch-key. And invite people to see me whom you aren't sure are the right sort, and discuss topics that you're quite sure *are* the wrong sort. And shock your mother by not taking enough interest in little Fanny. And get furiously excited over a book

or a picture or a bit of verse or a face or—or . . . the way a studio is arranged, or the first summer day in March, before anyone expected it . . . the first day that one can fling one's self down on to warm green grass and lie there . . . and lie there dreaming. . . ."

The byway of argument was fatal. She had forgotten that Samson had a corner in Nature.

At once he rushed into enthusiastic confirmation ; ignoring the former part of her speech except for a soothing remark to the effect that she'd be bound to settle down—as soon as she had a household of her own.

" I'd rather die than settle down," breathed Deb—to the defiant youth in her. Samson did not hear.

" You're quite good enough for me, little girl," thinking she had been sufficiently chaffed, and the moment had come to strike a more serious note. " Quite good enough. Run yourself down as much as you please, nothing you can say will make any difference ! "

No, nothing she could say would make any difference, or rid him of the supposition that she was merely deprecating—a prey to modesty. . . .

" I'm different—not worse nor better. We can't either of us be too good or too bad for each other if we're different."

" Very well, then, you're right, we're different. Don't let's say another word about it——" He smothered her uprising vehemence with a genial pretence of humouring her. " I give in. I'm entirely wrong. Have it your own way. We're as different as you please. And now, shall I call mother and the others, and tell her it's all right, and that we've made it up ? "

" No, please don't," she whispered. Her vitality was worn-out from the struggle.

He turned back from the door, disappointed. " Deb—is there another man ? "

" No," again. If only there had been someone, that she could have rung out a triumphant yes.

Phillips was relieved ; but knitted his brows anew over the problem of her obduracy. Then he asked her if she would marry him (*a*) " If I win the V.C. at the Front ? (*b*) " If I knew more about pictures ? (*c*) If I were more lively ? "

She shook her head at each tabulated item. But how queer, how pitifully queer that he should dream he could be persever-

ingly refitted for her love as for a suit of clothes which required slight alteration.

"I've never cared for anyone but you, Deb. Never. Other fellows might say that and not mean it—but it's true in my case. You can ask Beatrice, or mother. Or Abe—he always used to chaff me for not letting myself be plagued with girls. So you needn't be jealous—you're my first love, and I'm thirty-one."

Calf-love, then. . . . No wonder he blundered at every move. But he ought to have got that phase over long ago. Calf-love, moon-love . . . pretty enough from a lad of twenty-one; but from thirty-one you expect a man's defter handling. "You needn't be jealous." Should she tell him her fervent wish that some suave brilliant woman had indeed shaped him for present enlightenment? Deb had no ambition to be instructress. . . . But he would not believe her . . . impregnated as he was with his theory of female psychology.

"All girls say 'no' when they mean 'yes'; all girls like to pretend they're not worthy; all girls are jealous of the other woman in a fellow's past; all girls——" Deb was too tired to combat the 'all-girls' convention.

She stood up: "I want to go home, Samson." And he stood directly facing her. . . . A presentiment seized her that he was going to crush her in his arms. Perhaps, if he did—but no.

"I shall always be waiting for you when you want me, little girl. I don't change, you know. Hope and wait—that's going to be my motto!" He straightened his shoulders and pulled down his tunic and smiled at her.

Her hands flew up as though to push away a suffocating pressure. A past that held her only, the encompassing present—and now he claimed the future as well. . . . "It's so heavy," murmured Deb. He must not be allowed to wait for her—he *must not.* Could no word, no act of hers shrivel the Phillips' illusion? Besides . . . there were moods which might assail her, driven, persecuted moods that cried for anchorage; soft drowsy Oriental moods, when for sheer languor one might yield—neither of these moods ought to be open to the peril of a Samson waiting and hoping.

"It's no good, Samson," with ebbing conviction. And she hated his persistence—until she saw his eyes, dogged with misery, eager with the want of her.

"Then may I—I wonder if you would grant me a last favour? The victim at the block, you know," stumbling over a laugh.

She knew what was coming. . . .

"I wonder—if you will let me kiss you—just once?"

And because she had hurt him, and could make no other amends, and because she was ashamed it was such a trifle in importance to her; and because Deb could never bear to be avaricious of her chastity, she said: "Yes, if you like."

He was very deliberate and careful about it, with continual sideway glances at her, as though in fear permission would be retracted. The kiss itself . . . well, it was quite obvious that Samson had been speaking truth when he asserted that Deb was his first love. She clenched her hands tightly and endured . . . it was soon over! But a curious change had come over Samson. Metaphorically, he began to strut.

"Ah! I feel I've advanced a step—*now*."

Deb turned upon him in a blinding scatter of rage.

"Because I've allowed you to kiss me? Do you imagine, in your fatuous smug conceit, that it makes a difference, except to make me quite, quite sure—surer even than I was before—that you're the wrong man? You and your strictly honourable intentions, countenanced by the whole family! Why, do you suppose the man I loved would have had to ask formal permission for that kiss?—and that I would measure him out just one at arm's length as a dole? I, who know what kisses can be. . . . Oh, yes, I'm sick of pretending to be the Una of your private Faerie Queene. It's men like you, with minds like yours, who make girls mean and haggling and nigglesome. What makes you imagine that if I hold out a piece of my face towards you . . . just because . . . because . . ." a sob of sheer anger gulping up between the words . . . "because you asked, and I wanted to be decent, and didn't care much one way or another, what makes you dare to feel that you've 'advanced a step'? You haven't!—not a quarter of one!"

"Very well—I haven't—we'll *say* I haven't—I give in—you're quite right—I haven't advanced—are you satisfied now?" Again that futile pretence of placating her. But: "Kisses . . ." she whispered, dreamily, unheeding him, "kisses . . . like a shower of stars on my lips. Stars that burn. . . ."

Unconvinced of his error, he stated pompously: "I treated you with the respect which is due to a good girl, Deb."

Her smile subtly mocked him. "Ah, but you see, I have —not—been—good."

CHAPTER VII

I

But Cliffe Kennedy was indubitably to blame. No one could spend so much time with Cliffe as Deb had done of late, without echoing his tendency to achieve a climax at whatever cost. His sense of dramatic effect abhorred a vacuum. Deb had caught the trick, that was all. She was always impressionable. "I have treated you with the respect due to a good girl . . ." and then the pause—and, spoken almost mechanically, her curtain line.

"Well—he asked for it!"

The drawback to these histrionic displays in ordinary life, however, is lack of the aforesaid curtain. Certainly it should have fallen at that juncture: "You see, I have not been good . . ." and Act III a fortnight later. . . . Meanwhile, Deb and Samson remained looking at one another, in Mrs Phillips' boudoir, her head proudly tilted, so that the little three-cornered face was fore-shortened to an upcurling of black eye-lashes, and mouth a mutinous half-crescent, the corners trembling to a smile sternly chidden back again—"This is serious!"—but the irrepressible desire persisted. . . . Samson's expression was such a marvel of Pharisaic indignation and disgust.

"So much for the charity of a good man's love! Why, supposing it had been true and I wanted him to forgive me?"

In Samson Phillips' mind was no doubt of the statement which had shattered his rock-embedded belief in the immaculate chastity of a well brought up Jewish girl of his own set. . . . The argument: "Why should she say such a thing if it weren't true?" was too obviously undeniable for admittance. And Deb could have explained to him neither the contagious peculiarity of Mr Cliffe Kennedy, nor the fact that the Phillips' family and the thrice persistent proposal had rendered her hysterical.

Well—now at least she was free. Samson would never again desire her for his wife. Mrs Phillips would never again invite her to dinner. Although Deb had chosen a drastic method of dealing with undesirable invitations to dinner or to the altar—"do they have altars in a Synagogue? I forget . . . but oh, I wish he would speak before I laugh!"

But Samson's principles, against which in sheer despair she had flung her falsehood, stood rigid and undamaged, like so many spear-tipped railings. Henceforth, Deb was to him an outcast. He looked at her . . . and then he went to the door and called his mother, and told her Deb was not feeling very well and wanted to return home at once.

Mrs Phillips gathered from his expression that "that girl" had flouted him again. Deb was sent home in a taximeter and an atmosphere of black disgrace. Samson's one look had reminded her of a Roundhead soldier—Oliver Cromwell himself. What a fate to have escaped—Cromwell's wife, Cromwell's family. And a Jewish Cromwell into the bargain!

"But will he tell—anybody?"

"What does it matter!"

An impulse of sheer mischief—then swift contrition—intense relief—and the usual shoulder-shrug. This was the wheel of Deb's psychology. Several days later she told Antonia of the debâcle. Antonia had meanwhile been out of town, driving her Major-General.

"Samson would never have done for you, of course. But you encouraged him, Deb. Why?"

"I didn't," sunnily; "I just wanted to try if I could make myself good enough. And I pulled it off—for a fortnight."

"And then, in one well-chosen lie—Deb, I love you very dearly, but your creed is beyond all following. It seems to me to consist mainly of a lot of trouble for nothing."

"I just wanted to try," Deb repeated. "I *might* have been good enough, you know. And if the clock had struck while I was pulling that face, I'd have stopped like that. So Nurse used to say."

"Meaning—if you had fallen in love with a good man at the psychological moment of trying to be good. You're too accommodating altogether, my child. Suppose it were a bad man, and the clock struck while you were pulling *that* face?"

Deb went to the mirror, and tried on the two faces, one after another. "Which becomes me best?" she demanded

anxiously, "Puritan or rogue? Oh, Antonia, it was such fun busting the Phillips' illusion. I shall never have such fun again."

II

Samson was sent to the Front shortly afterwards. And Beatrice confided in her mother-in-law, Trudchen Redbury, her amazement that any girl could so far lose her reason as thrice to refuse a match like Samson Phillips: "She must have said something to upset him badly, that last time—but he won't say what; he seemed heart-broken, poor fellow . . . and going off like that, too, without any hope. How *could* she?"

Trudchen also wondered how Deb possibly *could* . . . and discussed the matter with Otto, who was thus at last brought face to face with the failure of his cherished notion of a marriage between his little daughter Nell, and an officer in the British army: "He vanted Ferdinand's Teporah? Ach wass! but I thought she and that yong Gennedy——" He remembered how the insolent pair had "called" on the Redburys one Sunday afternoon, for all the world as tho' they were engaged. And then had followed Cliffe's confidence in the train . . . the name left chivalrously blank . . . and not feeling at all friendly towards Deb, who had robbed him of an English son-in-law, Otto, by sudden malignant inspiration, inserted her name into the blank, and was instantly convinced of the correctness of his guess: "So! and *zat* vos vy she refused Villips!"

Otto sucked at his lips, very gravely . . . genuinely shocked and buffeted by the revelation that a maiden of the same race and class and upbringing as his own daughter, could so step aside from virtue. But then he ceased sucking, blew out his cheeks . . . and ruminated. . . .

That poor Ferdinand: with all his eccentric notions of rearing a young girl, one must yet be sorry for him. His daughter was no better than a—than a— Otto hesitated between a rich selection of epithets in two languages.

One must be sorry for Ferdinand. But it was a pity that he should not know that there was a cause why one was sorry for him—(Ferdie had always been the successful partner in the days when Nash, Marcus and Rothenburg had still existed as a

firm). . . . Bread and water and a locked room would do the minx good.

And in addition to all this, Otto was sufficiently akin in spirit to both Cliffe and Deb to relish the notion of dramatic tidings—himself as a sort of Messenger in Greek drama.

"If I do not tell Ferdinand Marcus, then zertainly another will do so——"

Which again would be a pity. Otto decided not to risk forestalment.

III

At the first shiver of Autumn, grandfather had a bad bronchial cold, which meant the luxury of a fire in his bedroom. During such a period all the Marcuses were usually to be found in enjoyment of this available private warmth, as a rest from the perpetual conviviality of the lounge or drawing-room fires. True, it meant that grandfather's company was thrown in with the fire—but Stella and Ferdie were used to him, and Deb and Richard thought him rather funny.

Otto, when he paid his visit, was received by the three generations of male Marcus. He requested that Richard be ejected, with that lack of ceremony towards his juniors which was so deplorable in the old-fashioned relative.

"All right, Uncle Otto—I wasn't going to stay, anyway. Where's David?"

David was in a training-camp. And: "Has that boy of yours nossing to do but pite his head off all day long, Marcus?" when the door had slammed on Richard.

"As much to do as your son-in-law Fürth," shouted Hermann with irascible emphasis. "Or perhaps you do not visit him often enough to ascertain his occupations? Herr Je! Rothenburg, he was a good enough Schiddach for your daughter Hedvig five years ago. . . ."

Otto did not like being addressed as Rothenburg. Especially as a door behind the cupboard communicated with another bedroom. He glanced uneasily that way. . . .

"There is no policeman there," his host reassured him. "Our neighbour is a rabbit who calls himself a Special Constable, that is all. And I am convinced, lieber Rothenburg,

that your naturalization papers are ready on your person and in complete order. Or—let me see—you are one of those that have changed their names . . . Redbury, is it?" the old scoundrel chuckled hoarsely. "Redbury!—poor old Fritzie Rothenburg of Nuremburg—your late uncle and my friend—that would have amused him—Redbury! But you must correct me if I forget."

And all this, in vengeance for the implied belittling of Richard.

The S.C. could be heard moving about among his furniture . . . and Otto's manner had not that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere—he accompanied the old man's loud discourse by an agonized hushing, which Hermann heeded no more than a drone of a bluebottle. From offensive English he lapsed into friendly—too friendly—German, enquiring affectionately after all Otto's relatives in Berlin, Mainz, Köln and Frankfurt, mentioning each person by name and address. And when Otto affected ignorance of the existence of these, he laughed and coughed, and coughed so much that he was perforce reduced to gasping watery-eyed silence, which gave Otto his chance at last for a patriotic panegyric which he trusted would reach the "S.C.," and so nullify any evil effects of Hermann's malice. "—My son is in the drenches, and my pones will one day lie in English ground. My money I give for England, and England, I bray, may still find a use for an old man's services, isn't it?"

"Ach wass!" impatiently interrupting the peroration. "You have been learning by heart the recruiting posters. I would advise a little less noise about patriotism, lieber Freund. You look like an enemy spy who has yet to learn not to overdo his business. It may bring you into awkward situations." Otto turned yellow and his fingers twitched. "Besides, a man who cannot be loyal to his own country——"

"England is my country!" cried Otto hysterically.

"Stuss!" and Hermann subsided contemptuously. While Ferdie broke in: "You have neither of you any sense at all. It is quite possible, papa, not only to be from prudence, but also in thought and from affection, loyal to an adopted country, where one has lived, and planted one's hopes, and brought up one's children. Would one bring up one's children to serve England before even war was in sight—if still one cared about Germany? But to shout it about—that is tactless nowadays.

They do not love the sound of our voices—unpleasant—yes, certainly—but natural. Let us then rather keep quiet, you and I, Redbury. Papa I respect for making no professions where he cannot honestly feel them—but he also should keep quiet. You are discourteous to a country of whom you are the guest. And also you make things very uncomfortable for us your family."

"I have no fear," snapped the old autocrat, sitting very upright.

"But I have then, for Stella and Deb and Richard. So when I feel pessimist, when my opinion is not likely to be a popular opinion, I keep it to myself. For the difference between us and the British-born is this: there is, alas, no bias on our judgments. That pleasant happy bias! ah, it must be reposeful to let one's judgment roll with the bias; but the bias is lodged in the nature, and the nature springs from the soil, and the soil of England is not ours—we who belong to no country, and are therefore doomed to see things exactly as they are. I tell you, Redbury, I would give ten years of my life to possess that cheery confidence that stupidly, and oh, how splendidly, through the blackest reverses, through the silliest muddles and incompetence, still goes on with their eternal Britannia rules the waves and Britons never, never, never shall be slaves. . . ."

"If you had a son in the drenches," repeated Otto virtuously.

And Ferdie sighed and said no more. In spite of all the daily suspense and anxiety, how he envied the Redburys their possession of Con. He had not yet forgiven himself the mistake which resulted in Richard's present mooching, slouching existence, not keen to go back to school—not worth while to enter a profession—waiting for his eighteenth birthday to bring him behind barbed wire.

"Ferdinand," said Otto Redbury, interrupting the other man's reverie, "I have gom on a very serious errand. . . ."

IV

When Stella and Deb came in to boil the kettle for tea, half-an-hour later, the Messenger was gone. Ferdie was staring into the fire, his fuzzy grey head bent down almost to his knees. And Hermann's thin lips wore a cynical smile . . . he had

waited for these results of Deb's upbringing, since a spoilt grandchild of eight years was first brought to Munich for his inspection.

"Deb—come here!"

Deb looked astonished. She could scarcely ever remember her father shouting at her. But to Stella the sound was familiar. The Teuton disciplinarian always begins by losing control of his voice. Ferdie, in supreme emotion, was reverting to type. . . .

"Did you spend a night——" he choked—then started off again: "Did you spend a night with that man Kennedy at his cottage in the country?—Yes or no?"

"What's the fuss about?" asked Deb, in Richard's most casual manner. She thrust her hands deep into the pockets of her lilac jersey, tilted back her chin . . . and wished devoutly she could run away.

"Yes or no?" roared her father.

"There was no harm in it."

"*Yes or no?*"

"No. . . ."

Sheer whimpering terror, this; not of the bellow which shook the very furniture, but of the blaze in Ferdie's wontedly mild brown eyes.

"You did not?" the relief was so overwhelming, his instant trust in her word so pathetic, that Deb for very shame quickly revoked her lie.

"Not in the way you mean. Why are you so ready to believe . . . girls and men in our set—the look of things doesn't matter so tremendously any more . . . doesn't matter at all—No, do listen to me——" She was honestly fighting down an inclination to sulk—a defiant silence, she would have interpreted the attitude—"I do know what it looks like to you, that I stopped down there with Cliffe that night—but really and truly," with an appealing little smile—"I'm still Daddy's good girl?"

"Then why," asked Ferdie, avoiding her smile—"why did you encourage and then refuse Captain Phillips?"

"Oh——" Deb stared mentally at these two bits of her—yes, her silliness, which entangled produced such a formidable appearance against her. Could she put herself right again? Not without help. She turned with quick confidence to her aunt.

"Auntie Stel——" and stopped as though at a shock.

"I suppose you had just enough decency left not to deceive

an honest man ! " Stella's voice sounded as though it had been filed. She crossed from Deb's side to her brother, the action clearly defining where her support was ranged.

" Ferdie," she whispered, for he had sunk back to a despondent, shrunken heap in the arm-chair ; and his knees shook as she laid her hand on them—" Ferdie, old boy. . . ."

" Little Deb . . ." he murmured. Well, Ferdie had always been a sentimentalist. And the girl, hearing, would have flung herself at him, even then, her arms tightly round his neck, to cajole and explain, explain by familiar hugs and kisses . . . but Stella was between them. And grandfather, still with that wooden smile jerking up the ends of his moustache. One expected it from grandfather, but Auntie Stel, always so young and jolly—Not quite the words—" juvenile and vivacious " expressed it better, somehow : " Run along and enjoy yourselves, kiddies. . . ." Why was Stella's look at her now like the sting of a wasp ? . . . that came of treating a grown-up chummily, and as an equal. Never again. After all, she *was* only a maiden aunt . . . couldn't tell her so . . . even in extremes one couldn't say the beastliest thing of all—evidently *they* could, though—no code of honour . . . Grown ups !

Deb hunched her shoulders in moody exasperation. Even if she *had* . . . done it, she never dreamt of this rasping encounter with authority. She, who had even honoured her immediate family by bragging about their tolerance and general amiability : " Dad's an old darling and Auntie Stel a sport, and nobody minds grandfather. . . ."

She said : " Samson Phillips was a prig."

" You will not quickly find another man for husband, my dear Deborah," Hermann Marcus rumbled menacingly. " You would have been wiser to strive to please Captain Phillips."

Stella turned and sprang, buried her claws in his words. " Husband !—do you suppose she wants a *husband* ? She's had what she wants. Look at her ! "

This, then, was what had lain in waiting all these years between herself and Deb—what extreme of love or hatred. That Deb should have her good time—that was well enough ; Stella did not grudge it her ; Stella helped her to it. But that Deb should stand there, in triumphant insolent knowledge of—the thing itself—the older woman could not bear that. Her starved senses yapped their rage and envy. Into Deb's very poise as she remained silent and aloof in the middle of the room,

Stella thought to read pity of her, the virgin, virgin by fate and by tyranny, by cowardice even, not by desire. . . . Deb, little Deb the child, Ferdie's baby daughter, had trodden strange ground, and by reason of this she was altered, baffling, mysterious, immune from scolding, forbearing to taunt because she could afford forbearance—what did she want with Aunt Stella's partisanship? she had taken what Aunt Stella had not dared to take. . . .

"Look at her!"

"Is there any reason," grandfather demanded impatiently, "why I should sacrifice my tea to look at an extremely badly-brought-up, dishonourable and wicked young lady who ought to have been married and out of the way long ago if she had owned a father who could properly attend to her interests. You cannot reproach me, lieber Ferdinand, that I have not warned you, over and over again, what would be the result of your loose and wicked lack of discipline——"

"Well, you didn't do so very much better with your daughter, did you?" cried Deb, resenting the attack on her father's easy kindness, but forgetting that her defence of him involved a slur on Stella.

"I've kept my good name at least, thank you, Deb; you've disgraced yourself and us, running to lick the hand of any man who chose to call. I hope your father will put a stop to it for the future, anyhow."

"He?" Hermann Marcus laughed, and Ferdinand, performing the proverbial action of shutting the stable door, went further and slammed it with all his force.

"You will attend to me, Deb, yes? I have made a mistake in trusting you. I let you do as you please, go where you please, without asking questions, without interfering. I hoped so to make you happy. For the future all that will be changed. You will not go out in the evenings, nor to stay with your friends. You will account for your time spent to me or to your Aunt Stella. I will see to it that you take lessons in something, to occupy you usefully. Less pocket-money and no latchkey—perhaps so we can bring you back to a sense of self-respect. Also I will ask to examine your correspondence. Be sure that it is not with pleasure that I give these orders——" He halted, hearing a poignantly mocking echo of his old prophecy to Dorothea: "It will be all right—When one is happy, one is also good——"

"I have made the worst mistake with you," he concluded harshly.

"Then I won't pay for it. I'll run away—I'm not going to be spied on and treated like a baby now, after you've let me do just exactly as I like for years. Why weren't you strict all along? I thought you were really broad-minded—that you really thought a girl had wants and claims . . . that a girl is human . . . and the marrying her off business is extinct, and that going wrong doesn't matter so much, after all." She was half-crying now, but gulped fiercely, and went on: "You let me suppose that you'd understand if I did—anything. But you're just exactly the same when it comes to it—the old-fashioned parent, ready with the old-fashioned curse. Well, then, you should have looked after me in the old-fashioned way. You should have done before all that you say you'll do now—examined my letters and disapproved of my friends and questioned my comings and goings. What do you suppose suddenly jerks a girl back, when she has read everything, discussed everything, seen everything——? Books and plays, jabber, and other people's example—answerable to nobody. Why, they're only preparation for—for . . . the rest! It wasn't as if I was answerable to anybody; you never bothered. I'd rather have been kept ignorant and innocent—much rather, dad. It isn't fair to bring me up in the new way, and then expect me to be good in the old way."

"And it is not fair to be for ever instructed by one's children how one should rightly have behaved towards them!" Ferdinand was now at the end of his patience. "First Richard and then you: 'Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you do that?' God in Heaven, is the parent a beast of burden that all your troubles and wrongdoings should be piled on to his back? And supposing I had scolded and worried you and forbidden—then it would have been again: 'You have ruined my life—a little more liberty, and I need not have been driven to—to—behave like a street-girl!' Always the parent's fault—you are shirkers, you who are so proud to call yourselves a New Generation—putting all responsibility on heredity, education, pre-natal influence—I know not what, so long as you safely escape self-reproach—so long as you safely escape the crying of your own conscience."

"Conscience is religion. I'm not religious. If I were—but you never bothered about that either. I'm not Jewess nor

Christian — I'm nothing at all — nothing — you never bothered."

"We did bother; yes indeed, but we were afraid of bothering too much. We wanted you to feel free."

"Well then—why?—now?"—wavering to a softer mood. When her father spoke with just that fondness . . . turning aside her head to blink back the tears, she caught sight of his old silk handkerchief, plum and navy-blue dabbed together, knotted round the bed-post in the same way as he was wont to knot it round his neck, as long as she could remember. . . . And suddenly Ferdie was dead—and she saw that loop with the dangling ends, and it struck her painfully that she would never again see it round Ferdie's neck, plum and blue stem to that genial rubicund face with the kind eyes . . . Dad was dead . . . everybody dies. . . .

Whether she had been vouchsafed a swift keyhole peep at an inevitable future, or if the vision were merely a childish drench of sentiment—whichever it was, it sent Deb straight past grandfather's sarcastic smile and Aunt Stella's antagonism, to her knees beside Ferdie's chair—snuggled up against him—Thank God, he was not dead yet!

"Dad—*mayn't* I explain?"

He just touched her black urchin head so near his hand, but said nothing.

"It's . . . men," Deb began. Such a maze of by-ways and turnings, and no centre. Could she ever hope to drag his understanding in the wake of her intricate journeyings . . . and with the others present? "It was the same in our old set before we gave up Daisybanks, before the war. There were always men about, then; when they took me on the river in the evenings, in a narrow punt, or in taxis—or behind screens on the landings at dances . . . screens put there generally by the hostess—what are they put there for? 'Enjoy yourselves, children!'—Dad, what did you *think* then? You can't possibly have imagined they all wanted to marry me, that they each wanted to marry every girl they took behind screens or up dark corridors—in the Empress Rooms or the Portman Rooms or the Grafton Galleries or Princes? But you must have thought something!"

But the trend of Ferdie's ideas had always run on generalizations . . . and generalizations would not suffice now to

content this daughter of his, turning up to him such a glowing, inquisitive little face.

"I was pleased that you should have admirers——" slowly—"Flirtation is only natural to a young girl."

"Admirers! flirtation! *that*, yes, but they—they used to kiss us—they said things—when they got excited. . . . They—Oh——" she rummaged desperately after words—"You—you grown-ups of to-day, you took away the chaperon and put up a screen on the landing instead.—It all means something—leads somewhere—and then you lose your tempers when you hear—when we. . . . And I didn't! I didn't do anything—this time. . . . But I must have something to go by; you must spell us out the rules once and for all. You're broad-minded, you encourage us—expose us; and at the end of it all, last century's row comes tumbling on our heads. If grandfather *was* a beast to Auntie Stel——" a darted sun-flash of mischief at the gathering storm on the opposite side of the fireplace—"at least he was a consistent beast; allowed her to know nothing and do nothing. You've stuck half-way—you let me know everything and do nothing. One day, I suppose, a girl will be allowed to know everything and do everything—lucky her!"

The storm on the opposite side of the mantelpiece broke into thunder: "Klatsch! klatsch! klatsch! talk! talk! talk!—Had it been Stella to be found out in shame——"

"Leave me out of it, papa. And you too, Deb," Stella threw in curtly, without turning from the window where she stood looking out into the dripping dusk. "I'm not ambitious to figure as an edifying example."

"Had it been Stella," Hermann persisted, not in the least heeding her protest, "My first business, as her father, would be interview the young man and see to it that he is made aware of his immediate duty towards her. But that, of course, does not strike Ferdinand. He prefers to sit like an old maid at a tea-party and discuss the so happy occasion!"

Ferdie, rather dazed, passed a hand across his forehead, wet with perspiration. "True—yes—I must see him at once," he muttered. For a few moments he had forgotten the indestructible fact of Deb's dishonour.

"See—Cliffe? Ask him to marry me? Dad—dad, you can't. . . . He'd laugh . . . they'd all laugh. It—it isn't done, in our set. We—I've told you—I thought you believed

me—no earthly possible reason why he should marry me. That night at the cottage . . . dad, I've *told* you—there was nothing. You mustn't go to Cliffe," in a sheer panic at the ridiculous situation thus threatened, she scrambled up from her knees, and confronted Ferdinand, also on his feet by now—"You shan't go to Cliffe. There was nothing!" she repeated doggedly. "Don't you believe me?"

"You did stop at his cottage that night—alone with him?" The Inquisition commenced anew.

"Yes."

"Why—what for—if there was nothing?"

"I don't know. No special reason. One does—nowadays."

"'Nowadays' has as broad a back as the parent, it seems," wearily. "'Nowadays' must shoulder everything. But only not human nature, Deb. I have had experience of human nature, that even 'nowadays' cannot alter."

Thoroughly exasperated, Deb wrenched herself away from all hope of convincing them. . . . "I haven't—I didn't—but I might as well have, and I wish I had!" was her sobbed-out threshold defiance.

. . . "My tea," grandfather reminded Stella, after a long silence.

CHAPTER VIII

I

"I AM writing to you, my dear Zoe, from the Café Romanico. But indeed the talk all round me is so loud, I can hardly collect my thoughts. My finger is better, but I have a pain in my neck. I do not know what it can be, for as you know I do not squander money on doctor's bills, which reminds me, my dear Zoe, that it is quite impossible that you can already have spent the ten pounds I gave you on leaving. . . ."

Suddenly Pinto looked up. Across the babel of sound, a familiar name struck his ear. . . . "Little Zoe Dene-Cresswell —si, si, I know her—I should have known her better but she was occupied—Oh, very occupied . . . all the day and most of the——"

"For shame, Gian. . . ."

Here the laughing voices became for the moment inaudible. Pinto knew the first speaker by sight. It was a friend of his friend Marchetti, who had arrived the day before from England to perform his military service. The other man, a stranger, wore the R.F.C. badge. They were at a table behind him, and doubtless had not recognized him. Without turning his head he strained his ears to hear more. The English boy was reading aloud from a letter.

". . . 'With the face of an orang-outang and the temper of a Patagonian savage!' . . . How she can put up with him, I don't know—and Cliffe says she actually seems fond of the horrid coarse brute. . . ."

Pinto had heard enough. He rose and stalked out of the café. He was amazed, staggered by this proof of Zoe's hypocrisy and infidelity. The world swam in yellow and green before his bilious gaze. So Zoe could write him every day those pretty little letters, sympathizing, yes, daring to sympathize with the many discomforts of his enforced trip, and all the while she was in the arms of another lover—a horrid coarse brute with a face like an orang-outang and the temper of a Patagonian

savage. . . . Pinto thought he could have borne it better, had his rival been a worthier man—in which supposition Pinto was entirely wrong.

In the first throes of his jealousy he decided never to see Zoe again, never to write to her explaining his desertion. Let her wonder at it as much as she pleased! He had been betrayed, he had been fooled, he who had always been so good to her! Even now the thought of the ten pounds rankled. How she must have rejoiced at the necessity for this business-trip! How she must have laughed in her sleeve during their farewells. . . . After all, she was a common little thing, this Zoe! He had tried to educate her taste, but she was evidently glad to sink again to the type of male with whom she was most at her ease. In time she would learn the difference. . . . Pinto preened himself. He had done with Zoe.

But a month later, when his business-affairs were concluded, and it was time to return to England, he decided that it was very dull, cutting people off for ever without seeing the effect upon them of this treatment; also he wanted his big row with Zoe; also he had discovered that no French girls could cook macaroni like a certain English girl. . . . He did not see why he should deprive himself of the relief of telling Zoe just exactly what he thought of her. His nerves were in a state of suppressed irritation for lack of a victim. Yes, most decidedly he would go to Zoe and have a grand scene with her, and then never see her again. Perhaps he would throw something at her; perhaps even, he would challenge his unknown rival. But this he resolved not to do, in case the challenge should be taken up.

II

"Antonia dear, Miss Stella Marcus has just spoken to me on the telephone. She asked for you. Perhaps I did wrong in not calling you, but she was kind enough to say that I was not to trouble. She seems to be in deep distress of mind, causelessly I should say, but of course I am in no position to judge."

"Why, mother?" Antonia and Cliffe were engrossed over a portfolio of Cubist pictures by an aspirant for their candid criticism, when Mrs Verity came to the door of the studio.

"Deb has eloped, with very commendable independence of

spirit, I thought, but I did not say so to Miss Marcus, who seemed in deep distress of mind. Forgive me if I repeat myself, Antonia dear. Cliffe, do, I beg you, forgive me if I repeat myself, but it is all so surprising."

"Eloped! Deb! but she's never said a word to me!" Antonia sprang to her feet, scattering the drawings over the floor. "Whom has she eloped with?"

"Miss Marcus *said* . . . but I really and truly doubt if she can be accurate, so perhaps I ought not to report her words—it is so very, very difficult to know what is tactful and prudent under such circumstances—but Miss Marcus said her niece had unfortunately eloped this afternoon with Mr Cliffe Kennedy!"

Antonia raised quizzical eyebrows in Cliffe's direction. "Present appearances are in your favour, Cliffe—but still——"

Kennedy protested heatedly: "I have most emphatically *not* eloped with Deb! Do I look as though I'd eloped with anyone this afternoon? What nasty people those Marcuses are, taking away a fellow's character!"

"Perhaps they did not mean it uncharitably, Cliffe; I trust indeed that if you or anyone were to elope with a daughter of mine, that I should approve heartily—though certainly elope has an old-fashioned sound. The Marcuses are slightly old-fashioned people; charming—I mean nothing to their detriment, but laggards in emancipation. Young people do not elope nowadays—they walk straight out of the dusty temple of convention on to the open heath. But pray do not allow me to be a bore; I merely wanted to assure you, Cliffe, that in repeating Miss Marcus' comment, I in no way attach any blame to your possible complicity."

Cliffe bent and kissed her hand in its black silk mitten.

"I regret to state, dear lady, that I've frequently invited a daughter of yours—I may say *the* daughter of yours, to step with me on to the open heath, but, deplorably archaic in her principles, she has always rigidly insisted on the prior formality of a registrar's office."

Mrs Verity shuddered slightly. It was one of her troubles that the late Mr Verity had succeeded in imposing upon her the legal right to bear his name, before she knew enough of life, or the New Movement, to resent it.

"Mother, you're being selfish. I want to know about Deb?"

"Oh, dear," full of contrition. "And you have been so

patient with me. Now let me try and be accurate: I gathered from Miss Marcus that violent argument had taken place this afternoon between little Deb and her father, in which he censured her, most unwisely, if I may be permitted to say so, for a too passionately independent spirit, and threatened her with closer guardianship for the future. The brave child, refusing to submit, has been seen leaving Montagu Hall at tea-time—no, a little after, with a suit-case, but without a word of explanation. They are anxious to discover her whereabouts. The object of the telephone call was to enquire if Antonia knew anything."

"But where do I come in?" demanded Kennedy in aggrieved innocence.

"Miss Marcus seemed to think it possible that you were involved in the flight, but she did not give me her reasons for supposing so. I mentioned indeed that you were here, but . . . Cliffe, if you have an appointment with Deb to-night," Mrs Verity glanced at her neat wrist-watch—"it is precisely a quarter to nine," she said anxiously. "You ought not to be late—if she has taken this step for your sake—I truly have no desire to be meddlesome, but——"

Cliffe turned sulky, asserted that he knew nothing about Deb, that she had probably gone for a walk, and that he and Antonia were due at Gillian Sherwood's at nine o'clock.

"People don't go out for walks lugging a suit-case. Don't be inhuman, Cliffe. Deb's such an impetuous little goose. . . . Oh, probably she has gone to La llorraine—or to Zoe. . . . Yes, I remember Zoe offered her a spare bed whenever she liked to drop in. I wish she had a 'phone." Antonia fidgetted irresolutely with an easel-peg, popping it in and out of its hole.

"I'll run round to Zoe," she exclaimed suddenly. "Explain to Gillian for me, will you, Cliffe? I shan't rest till I find out—it puzzles me why Deb doesn't come here. . . ."

After Antonia had quitted the studio, and Cliffe and Mrs Verity had enjoyed a little desultory chatter on Reconstruction of Sexual Morality in Conformity with the New Era of Womanhood, and what a pity it was that darling Antonia was so intolerant, he departed for Bayswater, where he found Winifred Potter lolloping in plump content on the horse-hair sofa, with a penny novelette.

"Hullo, Winnie, where's Gillian?"

"Hullo, Cliffe. I believe she's out. Or she may be in her

room. Just look. . . ." She was of the pretty unremarkable type of suburban girl, who wears beads round a podgy white neck, and never moves save under compulsion.

"Not in there, Cliffe," as he opened the door of the bedroom adjoining; "We've changed over, so that I needn't do the stairs so much. Jill sleeps on the third floor now. Wasn't it sweet of her to change?"

Cliffe grunted and ran up to the third floor, then down again.

"Not a sign of her. At least—no—the whole bally floor is littered with signs of her, but that's all. Is she out? She expected me and Antonia to-night to go to the Vermilion Club, but that's nothing; no inconvenience. Winnie, do wake up—you've grown fatter."

"Theo says I've grown thinner," said Winnie unperturbed.

"Theo was pulling your leg, my dear."

"Was he? Yes, he often does. He *is* a caution. . . ."

"Where's Gillian?" shouted Cliffe, whom, strangely, this placid young woman could always irritate to a frenzy—("If you *poke* her mind you only dimple the suet"—he complained to Antonia). "Where's Gillian? She invited Antonia and me to supper."

"I expect she forgot," lazily, "anyway, Antonia hasn't come, so it doesn't matter."

"I've come, haven't I?"

"Yes," Winnie sighed, and fingered her novelette.

"Well—I'm off again. Can't waste a moment. Tell Gillian that we're in a terrible state; Antonia has had to run round to Zoe—Deb Marcus is missing from home since yesterday—no; the day before—since days——" he paused, for sensation.

"How perfectly awful. But I expect she'll come back," yawned Winnie.

It had become more essential to Cliffe than anything else in the whole world, that Winifred Potter should be made to display some rending emotion.

"No. She won't come back. I . . . happen to know she won't come back, you see."

Winnie dangled her bare braceletted arm over the side of the sofa and picked up a cushion which had slid to the ground.

"Why? Do you know where she is?"

"No. Only where she isn't. Only where she isn't, Winnie. And that's on earth."

. . . After all, it was merely the question of the novelette.

Now that Cliffe had really produced a thrill which out-rivalled even "The Sin of Lady Jacynth" by Coronal, Winnie immediately yielded him what he coveted in the way of attention all agape. She was personally acquainted with neither Deb nor Lady Jacynth, but Cliffe had proved himself a better author than Coronal.

"— *Dead?*"

He nodded curtly, and stood for a moment with eyes fixed on the carpet . . . then bent and cut off a loose strand absently with his penknife . . . seemed on the verge of speaking . . . thought better of it. Winifred watched him; her light blue eyes were circles of horror and fascination.

"She's not dead," abruptly; "forget that I said it. I ought not—Ought I?—I don't know. . . . Upon my soul, I don't know . . ." he began to stalk the room, hair falling shaggily over his frowning forehead, as he jerked his head in acute mental conflict.

Winifred was rapacious for detail: "Did anyone treat her badly?" she whispered, with healthy gloating. "Any man, I mean?".

And one man stood stock-still as though he had been shot.

"What makes you ask *me* that?"

"Was it you?" queried Winifred, very naturally.

And then he unburdened himself. He had by this time safely crossed that precarious borderland stage in the Life of a Lie, by Cliffe Kennedy, when that lie, from being artistically perceived, created and approved by his own consciousness, is slowly and mysteriously merged, as far as he was concerned, into genuine and independent existence, the self-supplied ground-work entirely obliterated from his memory.

He was mostly worried, it seemed, as to whether he ought to tell Deb's people . . . what he knew. Directly he heard that she was missing, her threat of suicide had scorched like fire into his mind. . . . Why, that night on the open common . . . black blown space, and Deb's wild hair swept straight out like a drenched black banner by the wind; and Deb's mood black as night itself, and as passionate, declaring that she meant to die—that she was tired of fighting God—"tired of fighting Him for you, Cliffe. . . . And sometimes it's easier to die than to live——" He had no very clear notion of what the fuss was about, but he saw her face, a grey blur, save where her eyes and mouth were wet and black . . . and knew

it was best for him to turn and go ; her ragged sobbing followed him through the swish of the rain, black slanting stripes of rain. . . .

So the man's racing sense of what was fitly beautiful and tragic caught the scene and flashed it into being ; so his infallible ear caught the sounds, . . . and so he described it to Winnie Potter—till the complete vision was broken all into bits—like the Cubist pictures which he had last seen strewing the floor of Antonia's studio.

. . . Mrs Verity's recent remarks, a certain conversation with Otto Redbury in the Tube, the actual Saturday to Sunday spent at Seaview, telepathic oddments from Winifred's conventional expectation, suggestion from the cover-picture illustrating " The Sin of Lady Jacynth," were all stirred and flung pell-mell into the descending spiral vortex of Cliffe's prismatic imagination.

" Oh ! " gasped Winifred at the end of the recital, " but I do think you ought to tell them, Cliffe, even if you're not sure—they might want to drag the river, or something. . . . Anyway, they've got a right to know."

" Granted that—have I the right to tell them ? The Aunt mentioned me as being mixed up in the whole horrible business, when she 'phoned Mrs Verity. *Am I the person to tell them ?* . . . when it may not even be true . . . when I may be only the victim of my cursedly morbid imagination—And yet—I wish to Heaven, Winnie, that someone would take the decision out of my hands. I can't stand it much longer—holding the secret alone—it gnaws . . . like the fox—Spartan boy—you know ! . . . I hold it tight, and it gnaws. What do you suppose my nights are like ? " turning with ferocity on to his hearer, who replied simply : " What things you do say, Cliffe ! "

" Ought I——" he hacked anew at indecision. The puzzle existed for him as surely as though it were wrought in bits of metal, and sold in a box for fourpence-halfpenny. Deb was missing ; his name was mixed up in it ; ought the Marcuses to be told what he knew about that night—(hiatus)—at Seaview ? Was he the right person to tell them ? These were all facts. The hiatus was slurred over unperceived. . . . it was such a tiny hiatus. Winifred Potter was responsible for it, by being fat, and yawning, and talking in that slow flaccid way of hers. . . . But it was an absorbing problem ! And underneath a top layer of recently-manufactured tragedy,

Cliffe's genuine nature was genuinely concerned about Deb, and the circumstances which attended her flight from home, and his own possible share in the matter. Was any course of action expected of him—not officially by her family, but in the way of ordinary decency? An offer of marriage? Surely not! but he ought to go and look for her——

In the river?

Who said she was in the river? truculently. Winifred Potter. She had talked about dragging it . . . nasty idea! Anyway, how did she know? She was too fat to know anything—just a mischief-maker—And then again—ought the Ledburys to be told? . . . Would it be worse for them to wait from hour to hour and from week to week, hope slowly drained away—or be dealt the sudden blow?

Not by him in any case. Not by the man who ought to have married Deb.

His entranced mind, pacing the hiatus like a bridge between fact and fancy, took him out of the house and half-way down the street before he even realized that he had left the room. And he had completely forgotten to say good-bye to Winifred.

. . . Presently she picked irresolutely at the edges of "The Sin of Lady Jacynth." She wondered if it would be wrong to finish it; like—like raising the blinds too soon after a funeral. But—it was not as if she had known Deb any better than Jacynth. And the solution to that lady's sin was so handy . . . one did not have to go out and drag for it, or even move from the sofa. . . .

Winifred did not move from the sofa, not when the front-door bell was violently pealed—again—and several times again. She went on reading. After about six minutes, the lodger on the third floor, who had previously admitted Cliffe, came tramping wearily down the stairs again to let in Gillian Sherwood.

"So you *are* at home, you lazy young pug. And awake?"

"Have you lost your key again?" Winnie reprimanded her.

"Yes—no—here it is, in the ash-tray. I remembered suddenly that Cliffe and Antonia were supposed to turn up to-night, and flew home." Gillian, yielding to natural tendencies, scattered widely her hat and gloves and coat in various portions of the room. Then chased them and retrieved them and draped them tidily on one chair, remembering that if she did not do so, nobody would. It was on understanding

of the performance of this and like jobs that Winifred had been enlisted as her room-mate. Thus Gillian would be left free to be a genius. Winnie was glad to leave her own chaotic home of exacting parents and brothers. She ensconced herself tranquilly and for good on the sofa of Gillian's furnished apartments. Having naturally a sweet disposition, she did not complain because it was a horsehair sofa and very slippery. And Gillian, having naturally a sweet disposition, enlivened by humour, continued to make brilliant effective dashes at domesticity, in the between-whiles of her other work ; with the sole difference that now she cleared up for Winifred as well as for herself. She had grown fond of the plump little parasite ; and took the same sort of freakish delight in her as Cliffe in Otto Redbury. And Winifred was mulishly averse from returning home ; she was happier with Gillian ; Gillian gave her more pocket-money than ever father did. And Gillian was famous—a personage. . . . It was all very nice. She was never going to leave Gillian.

Gillian began to hurl supper on to the table, smashing three plates and a jam-jar, confidently indifferent as a conjuror who smashes a watch in the knowledge that he can produce it whole again out of the top-hat of the Gentleman in the Back Row. Winifred watched her listlessly for a few moments, till it dawned upon her that knives and forks were being laid for four.

" Cliffe and Antonia aren't coming. Didn't I tell you ? Cliffe has been here already, and he says that Deb Marcus has killed herself ! "

" Then she probably has a cold in the head," Gillian commented, with the perfect serenity of one who has often sampled the output from the Kennedy factory.

Winifred was indignant ; and even roused herself to convince Gillian ; who presently admitted that there " might be something in the story ! "

" —Anyhow, Cliffe oughtn't to be allowed to walk about with such a dynamo joggling loose in his pocket. Did you say he did or did not intend to explode it on the Marcus family ? Because if the girl is really missing, it may frighten them."

" He wasn't sure. Never mind. We don't know any of them." And Winifred rolled off the sofa and established herself comfortably at the table.

Gillian's eyes twinkled at her—narrow green-grey eyes set askew in an odd, thin, freckled face. Gillian's body was also

thin and small-boned to a degree. And her hair, which, by all the rights of compensation should have been a gloriously redeeming feature, was short and mouse-coloured and ragged —short with the round pudding-basin effect. The man who loved her could say that she had pretty wrists and ankles, and enormous fascination. Then, lacking material, he must perforce cease from hyperbole.

(" Go on, Theo—what next ? " and he could never be quite sure if she were wilfully plaguing him, or else blind to her own shortcomings. " Theo, do you know a bit in Browning about ' Mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ' ? . . . Jolly line, isn't it ? . . . Or d'you admire the slender type more ? I—I suppose you *would* call me slender, wouldn't you ? . . . Not exactly the right word ?—Well, *svelte* then ? . . . like ladies in the corset advertisements. No ? Theo, not—not scraggy—Oh, you wouldn't call me scraggy, would you ? . . ."

Then, after a pause, still persistent: " Theo—*would* you call me scraggy ? Do tell ! "

" You're just the squeak of a mouse made concrete, Gillian."

" That's not such a good line as Browning's," she sighed. And he, being a sensual epicure, sighed also, thinking of the great smooth marbly limbs—and for the thousandth time racked his brains for what attracted him so mightily and desperately in this exasperating bit of a creature with—with——

" *Well*, Theo ? " expectantly.

" With remarkably pretty wrists and ankles."

And: " Go on, Theo," in complacent appreciation of these. " What next ? ")

" Where's the blanc-mange ? " enquired Winnie, whose favourite pudding it was.

Gillian pushed her hands backwards through her hair, in an effort of memory ; " I believe I turned it out on the wash-stand in your room. You'll find it there when you want it."

" Why, are you going out again ? " as the other rose impetuously from supper.

" I'm not happy about that Deb Marcus kid. . . . Not my business, but Cliffe is such an irresponsible lunatic—and if even Antonia doesn't know what he's saying about it all——"

" Nobody knows but me and him," said Winifred importantly. " It's a secret."

Gillian bestowed on her a quick mobile grin. " Mind you keep it, then. Did you say Antonia had gone round to Zoe ? "

Winnie nodded, her mouth full of salad.

"Right. 'Night, Winnie.—Lord, I'd nearly forgotten that key again. Why didn't you remind me? Think of the national calamity if I'd called you up out of bed."

Winifred assented, but reflected no doubt that there was always the lodger on the third floor. . . . "You might give me the blanc-mange, Jill, as you're up."

III

"I say, is my sister here?"

Zoe opened her eyes very wide: "Are you *Seul au Monde*?" she whispered cautiously, bending from the threshold towards Richard till her rumple of primrose curls fell forward over the shoulders of her frilly white dressing-jacket.

He stepped back a pace.

"Because if you are"—with a gurgle of laughter—"then I'm *Petite Sœur*—but you're not half as French as I thought you, and why aren't you in your nice uniform? Never mind—are you hungry? Did you cross to-day? Do you think you're going to like me as much as you supposed?"

"Well, honestly, you're awfully jolly and all that—but you see we're a bit bothered about Deb just at present. Is she here?"

"Deb—oh, then you're *her* brother. Mr Richard Marcus, isn't it?" Zoe immediately adapted herself to the change of notion, and all the possibilities it in its turn entailed. "D'you know who I thought you were? My unknown correspondent at the Front—I answered his Ad. in the "Vie Parisienne"; there was no harm in it, was there? He wrote back such a darling letter—and promised to come here on his next leave. So of course I thought. . . . But it doesn't matter one bit, so do come in. I'm really rather glad you've come, between ourselves, because my landlord's called on me and he's perfectly *awful* when he starts."

"What a beast!" rather hazy, nevertheless, as to what it was the landlord started. Possibly the poor kid was behindhand with the rent, and he was trying to cart away her furniture. "I say, *is* Deb here?"

"No, but I daresay if she told you to meet her here, she'll turn up presently, so you might as well wait. I've often wondered what you were like . . ." with a serious intimate

scrutiny from under drawn brows, which she always found "went" well with under seventeen and over sixty. "Come into the sitting-room. You'll excuse these clothes, but I was just dressing for to-night when he came"—with a nod towards the room—"and you won't believe me, but I've had to be perfectly horrid to him . . . to counteract the effect of my hair down, you know. I suppose he has the kind of wife who keeps hers always in iron curlers—shouldn't you think he has? So, poor man, one would expect a little agitation. But there are limits, aren't there? I mean from one's landlord. So you really are a godsend . . . a sort of guardian angel. Isn't it curious, but I've always, even when I was a kiddie, wanted to see my Guardian Angel in the flesh—at least in his clothes—you know what I mean? Because I was always quite sure he was a man—it didn't seem right that he shouldn't be, somehow."

"Bet you could have made a man of him, anyway," said Richard in blind admiration. And he was right; Zoe could be relied on to rouse the sex element from any substance in her vicinity, even a guardian angel.

Delighted with his tribute, and still gabbling, she preceded him into the sitting-room, and prettily introduced him to the landlord, a very low man, but genial, and obviously with no evil intentions on the furniture. The difficult point at issue seemed to be that he desired to pay for the new carpet; and Zoe, wriggling coyly on the edge of temptation, would yet not quite yield to it. "Though if spitting on a carpet makes it yours, I'm sure I've no more claims at all, Mr Wright!" with a look of coquetry that mellowed her unexpectedly frank rebuke.

Richard was enjoying it—enjoying *her* immensely. There was no real cause for alarm about Deb; only the family were fussing. And he was flattered by Zoe's skill in making him feel essential to her being, while dimly recognizing that the flattery was somewhat impaired by its too even distribution between himself and the landlord. Zoe was not in the least Richard's ideal. But Zoe was—well, rather a rag! And she bespoke applause by the zest and candour with which she demanded it, retailed it, invented it . . . her existence might present a surface appearance of muddle, but perhaps more than other girls she could hail herself as a success. Zoe knew how to unwind unlimited quantities of what makes you happy, and

how to be made happy by a material of which unlimited quantities exist for the unwinding.

"I'm going to be taken out this evening by a Cavalry giant who clanks and jangles the whole way up the stairs, and calls me 'You dear little thing! fancy livin' all alone with no one to look after you—it's a shame!'—and brings me presents. He's about forty and thinks I'm not quite seventeen; and when I perch winsomely on his knee and turn his pockets inside-out to find what he's got for me, he's just as pleased as a little child. Really he is! And then I spread out all my presents on the table to make them look more, and dance round them and skip and clap my hands with glee. Oh, he loves it when I clap my hands with glee. You shall both see me do it if you wait long enough. Isn't it funny what things please some men? Sometimes I say 'What have you brought me?' and he says 'nothing at all' to tease me, and I pout—like this—look—look, Mr Marcus!—and he can't bear to see me so disappointed and pulls an enormous painted chocolate-box from behind his back! That sort of treatment is wonderfully rejuvenating, you wouldn't believe it; tons better than massage. There he is, and I'm not dressed yet!" She scuttled into her room as a door banged down on the street level; then popped her head in again to say: "You'll keep him entertained, won't you, till I'm ready? He's quite easy!"

"Would he rather have me or Mr Wright to perch on his knee?" laughed Richard.

"Ef it's fur turnin' aht 'is pawkits, it'ull be me!" the landlord remarked with a facetious wink.

As the footsteps were heard, though without any of the perceptible clank and jangle foretold, Zoe again appeared, with comb tugging at her curls.

"I wonder if the sight of you two would upset him. . . . I've told him that I had no friends in the world except him and one old lady who's kind to the lonely little girl"—she eyed the landlord dubiously—"Oh, you could pretend to be the broker," with a quick spurt of inspiration. "Will you, Mr Wright? It might make him feel generous, mightn't it? And you"—even in the extremity of haste and peril she checked herself from a tactless decision that maybe Richard was too young to matter much—"You—behind the curtain. No—your boots will show. Get into the cupboard—Quick!"

She banged the door on him, and banged her bedroom door, just as the front-door of the flat, left open at Richard's entrance, banged shakily behind the entering newcomer.

"Like a bally old farce," Richard reflected; he did not know that people ever really hid in cupboards. Though in Zoe's flat such behaviour seemed not only free from eccentricity, but rhythmically correct.

He knew the flat quite well. . . . Richard's imagination was not the choked-up affair of a year ago. This was the flat where comic misunderstandings took place, and false identities, where an incriminating glove was left in the corner, and where screens fell down at the wrong moment; it was the flat for runaway wives; the flat where the husband is made to look a fool. It was jolly, now, actually to be in such a flat, actually to be the Man in the Cupboard; Richard chuckled silently . . . then grew impatient, till, after seemingly endless waiting in muffled darkness the fourth wall against which he pressed his weight gave way, and he stumbled forward into a room full of people. . . . "Fancy, I forgot you for the moment," laughed Zoe, who had released him. "Why didn't you bang or shout? Here's Antonia come to find Deb. I'm sure I don't know why all London is running here this evening to enquire after that sister of yours. Isn't it funny—she and Monsieur le Caporal met on the stairs, and *he* thought she was *Petite Sœur*, didn't you?—just like I took Mr Marcus for *Seul au Monde!*"

A young man in uniform, with round red cheeks and a tassel dangling from his cap, stood adoring Zoe with an embarrassed smile, obviously not understanding a word of her harangue. There are two types of Belgian soldier—the stolid peasant who is shy, and the dapper townsman who is bold. Zoe unfortunately had hooked one of the former species. Undaunted, she turned her welcome into French with morsels of pidgin English inserted for the benefit of Mr Sam Wright, that he might not feel left out of the conversation; Richard over by the window, was explaining to Antonia about Deb.

It was Mr Wright who discovered that the Belgian had had nothing to eat for fourteen hours. "'Old on, Missy—the young chap's guts is fair yawning for a bit o' something solid. This is my treat—see—and you go an' cook a steak for 'im. Veev la Belgium!" and the Corporal, understanding, stood at attention—and then bowed gratefully to Mr Wright, to

Antonia, and Richard, and Zoe, in turn, while the tassel from his cap bobbed absurdly. . . .

Zoe, interrupted in a rapid *résumé* of her own intimate history, calculated to set the intruder at his ease, took up the threads again while she ran in and out of the kitchen, laying the table and grilling the steak.

" Isn't it a good thing I've still got some wine in the house—this is the last bottle, but I expect more to-morrow—it's a present. Oh, not from Captain Braithwaite—I wonder why he's so late, by the way ?—but there's an Italian wine-and-macaroni shop just round the corner, and the owner is simply crazy about me . . . an atrocious old man with black teeth, but he does stock good wines, and so cheap. . . . His wife caught him out ogling me over the counter one day, and now she won't leave the shop, so the old demon comes round here, and brings me Chianti on the sly, hoping to melt me. There's not the slightest chance that I shall be melted, but you don't think it's wrong of me to accept the wine, do you ? I mean he takes the risk of losing all and gaining nothing, doesn't he ? . . . Of course I daren't let him into the flat, besides, I wouldn't do such a thing ! No, I wouldn't, because I don't honestly think it's right, if his wife feels like that about me, do you, Mr Wright ? So I half open the door and tell him to leave the bottles outside and go away quietly for both our sakes ! He supposes I've got a jealous husband—the Italian bandit kind, with ribbons and daggers all the way up their legs. . . . And just fancy, once he had the cheek to come round without any wine at all, and said—well, I didn't know men were like that, did you, Antonia ? But I sent him home to fetch some pretty quick. Wouldn't you have ? " appealing to the Caporal. who murmured " Mais oui, certainement ! " and sat down to his steak as to a serious business. He shovelled up the food strangely, and thought how beautiful was Zoe, in her white frilly dressing-jacket, clouded with yellow curls. . . .

" Why not go round to La llorraine ?—Deb might be there," Antonia suggested. And reluctantly Richard stood up. Deb was a nuisance—of course she was all right. He disliked La llorraine and Manon ; but Zoe and her doors and her landlord and her Belgian and her spaniel and her lovers and her stories, had a unique flavour of attraction. Any further developments, comic or ridiculous, might occur at any moment, in this atmosphere. . . . Sure enough, a door banged four flights

of stairs away . . . scuffle of many feet approaching—and :

"Why, it's Captain Braithwaite," cried Zoe, in a clear, childish treble of astonishment. "And did you find little Becky and Mark and Joey on the stairs? What's the matter, Becky? broken your scooter? . . . never mind, let me give you a ginger-snap—two ginger-snaps are better than one scooter, aren't they? What a pretty drawing of a thermometer, Joey? Is it for me? Now that is sweet of you."

"Mother thayth I'm to athk you to 'ave a look at me thore throat, Mith!" The children of the Second Jewish Tailor, whom the good-natured Cavalry officer had gathered and brought in from the landing, were grouping themselves round Zoe's Barrie-like representation of the lonely little mother to whom all the children bring their troubles, as spontaneously and efficiently as though they had been rehearsed for weeks. Zoe really had been very good to them in different ways at different times, and their present adhesion round her knees, in full view of a beaming Captain Braithwaite, was her reward.

Antonia, in an aside to Richard, anxiously questioned her own grotesque fancy that yet another set of doors had just banged, and yet more footsteps were scuffling and clattering up the stairs: "This flat is haunted by a delusion of banging doors—listen!"

"Listen!" echoed Zoe, smashed into sudden silence—"It's Pinto!" she whispered, all her gay resourcefulness paralysed.

"She hears it too," Antonia sighed with relief; "I don't mind so much if we're all raving together!" And indeed it was obviously incredible that the corpulent whiskered person who was projected squealing into the sitting-room, by an image of bony yellow ferocity, could be otherwise than chimera. The wine-bottles which the pursued swung in impotent arabesques from either hand, erased the last touch of credibility.

"Face—like—an—orang-outang—temper—Patagonian savage . . ." were the only words distinguishable from the yapping, snapping medley of limbs and bottles and vituperation.

There was a crash of splintered glass, and ruddy liquid poured into pools on the carpet, and Zoe cried out to Captain Braithwaite, who flung his big form on top of the belligerents and wrenched them apart. The ensuing sequence of events was rather too nimble for disentanglement. The Italian wine-and-macaroni merchant from round the corner collapsed

panting—then rallied his faculties and bolted for the door. Zoe darted in his wake, and returned triumphant, a few seconds afterwards, carrying the second and undamaged flask of Chianti. Meanwhile Pinto had vented his spleen upon the Cavalry officer, the landlord, the round-eyed Belgian, and Richard, on whom each in turn he fastened his saga of "face like an orang-outang—tempaire of a P-P-Patagonian savage!" . . . The return of Zoe he greeted by a violent and uncomprehensible outbreak of what was certainly bad language and probably Portuguese; informed her that he knew all about it, and was done with her for ever . . . caught up a chair and wrenched it into fragments . . . glared viciously at the innocent amazement of Monsieur le Caporal; jabbed an accusing finger at him—"You—yes, it is you—you may have her—she is worth nothing, I tell you—stop eating and take her—take her—take her!" lifting the remains of the steak from the plate and flinging it across to the window, where it narrowly missed Antonia—"Here—just you stop that!" Richard ejaculated, doubling his fists truculently.

"Leave 'im alone, Sonny—'e dunno wot 'e's doing!"

The finger travelled instantly round to the pacifist—"Whose is this house, you——?"

"Mine!" the landlord retorted, putting up his boots on the sofa as a sign of ownership. "Nah shut up, do—ladies present!"

"It is then you with the face and the temper?"

"Face and temper yourself!" from Mr Sam Wright, which retort, though merely made in the way of casual repartee, was, had the assembled company only known it, the full explanation of the scene so astounding them.

But Pinto's suspicions made a last leap at Captain Raymond Braithwaite. "Take her"—flourishing with both arms in Zoe's direction. "She is ungrateful, unloyal. True affection is not to be found in her nature. She lies and thieves; she is untidy in her clothing; she has betrayed me and will betray you. Take her—perhaps your temper like a Patagonian savage will keep her in order. Take her and beat her if you please. Who am I to have a claim? . . ." He recapitulated the entire list of Zoe's crimes, linked to the benefits his easy-going generosity had showered upon her; shed tears at the recollection of his own innocent confiding trust and little tender ways; surpassed himself in an ebullition of Portuguese and

English blended into one final expanding monstrous, wall-cracking, hair-stiffening execration, anathema, and blight——

Antonia stepped forward, and laid her hand on his arm.

"You're not behaving at all nicely, and we're tired of you," she said gently but distinctly.

Pinto, checked in his onrush of epithet, rolled round at her a pair of livid, yellow eyeballs; spluttered; made a few inarticulate sounds in his throat—and departed.

No one could deny that his visit, though short, had been full of lively colour.

"Ma foi!" said the Belgian poilu, still gaping stupidly after his steak.

Richard burst into a shout of laughter, and went on laughing boyishly, irresistibly. It was infectious . . . presently Sam Wright joined in, and Captain Braithwaite, and Antonia, and even the Belgian. Zoe, on the verge of tears, was the last to succumb. . . . "At least, we've got some wine now," she gurgled, divided between sobs and hysterical mirth. "And we'd better drink it—it's g-good wine and so cheap! I'm glad I remembered just in time to nip it." She darted away for glasses—"But honestly, I haven't the faintest idea what Pinto was so cross and unkind about, have any of you?"

"He did seem a bit annoyed: what?" guffawed Captain Braithwaite. "Here's to his good recovery!" They all drank Pinto's health in excellent Chianti. . . . A bell tinkled from below.

"Oh dear! he must have jammed the downstairs front door in going out, and now people can't push it open. I do think he ought to control himself a little bit better than that, don't you? I mean, it's so horrid when one has visitors." The bell tinkled again impatiently. "Will one of you go down?"

IV

Deb dawdled along the street, painfully carrying a suit-case. La llorraine had insisted on keeping her to supper, but the Countess was occupying the only vacant room in the house . . . anyway, you could always rely on a bed at Zoe's whenever you turned up—time enough to-morrow to think things over. . . .

Somebody was already on the doorstep pealing at the bell:

" The door usually stands open, but it must have got jammed. . . . Do you want tailor Moses, tailor Jacob, or tailor Isaac ? "

" I don't want a tailor at all, thanks. Not to-night, anyhow. I want Zoe Dene-Cresswell ? I wonder if she's in."

Again Gillian tugged at the bell. " You look as if you ought to be Deb Marcus."

" I am."

" I'm Gillian Sherwood. Put down your suit-case and shake hands. I'll carry it up for you, if ever they admit us."

Gillian at last ! Deb was first conscious of triumph—followed by a quick pang of guilt. She had not sought out this meeting ; it was purely accidental—but what would Antonia say ?

Antonia opened the door to them.

PART III

CHAPTER I

I

Deb was living with La llorraine. She indignantly refused to return home on the understanding that she was to be partially forgiven for an offence she had never committed ; on the other hand, her affection for Ferdie caused her a pang of acute misery when she saw how the belief in her sins had stripped him of a certain chubby contentment which even the war and its complications had hitherto left unimpaired. For of course her swift dramatic rupture with her family toppled to an anti-climax. Richard took home the tidings of her whereabouts ; and a day after her flight, Aunt Stella appeared at Zoe's for a parley. The tolerance of the period did not permit an erring daughter to be blasted with a parent's curse and left to suicide—or worse—in the dark cold streets of London. The tolerance of the period sanctioned some natural anxiety over the said daughter's material welfare, tentative negotiations, and a return home to a great deal of nagging and an atmosphere of reproachful discomfort. Perhaps Deb foresaw the final inevitable item ; perhaps also, her passionate self-persuasion that she could not bear continual witnessing of Ferdie's sighs and worried forehead, was the outcome of a guilty suspicion that it was more by haphazard than by virtue that she was able to mount her pedestal and stand aggrieved upon it.

" It's the fault of my very lax upbringing," she argued with the guilty suspicion.

" Yes, but——"

" It's lucky that I have a certain fundamental standpoint of moral decency," with crushing pomposity.

" Yes, but——"

The yes-buts had it.

" I can't live at home with Aunt Stella hating me like this," weakly.

And here she was right. Even Ferdie recognized that his sister and his daughter were henceforth not likely to dwell together in a state of affectionate harmony. Stella had been queer about Deb ever since discovery that Deb was—initiated. What was to be done? And then La lloraine appeared at Montagu House, an emissary from Deb.

"My dee-urr—leave it to me."

La llorraine was magnificent, she was Miladi, she was Josephine Beauharnais, and Madame de Maintenon and Louise de Querouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth, and every other *intriguante* of foreign history, entrusted with dispatches and a cardinal's secret, a go-between from one royal court to another. She wore filmy black, and a huge black hat cast a mysterious shadow over her eyes; she wore all her sables, and Parma violets; and fingered them meaningly with her long thin white hands as though they were a symbol of a lost cause. She flattered, cajoled and hinted, and laid down her cards and picked them up again; and her speech was worldly and witty and wise, and her smile was maternal, or suggestive, or discreet, and she overwhelmed Ferdie Marcus with dupery and diplomacy, and left him quite dazed, but convinced that the arrangement made was the only one possible in view of the subtleties involved; and that moreover it had emanated straight from him.

"So, my dee-urr, you join us in our humble little appartement, and your father will put you in possession of your own income. Have I done well?"

"—Turned out of home plus a cheque-book?—that's what I call an *éviction de luxe*," laughed Antonia, when Deb told her of the new arrangement, while re-packing her suit-case to quit Zoe's flat five days after her weary arrival. Zoe was out at rehearsal.

"What are you going to pay La llorraine per week for board and lodging?"

"My-dee-urr," Deb imitated the grand manner and the large gesture by which her future landlady had dismissed the question—"Zat—between us? it shall arrange itself——"

Antonia looked enigmatic, and warned Deb that the first time she arrived at the appartement, and found her breakfasting at eleven o'clock in a dirty wrapper and curl-papers, in the Venetian drawing-room, on stale mayonnaise, with La llorraine practising scales, and Manon being demure with the fishmonger

because the canaille wanted to be paid, she would immediately haul her off to an environment less pictorial but more hygienic.

"Fishmonger, indeed!" Deb turned Quelle Vie out of the suit-case, "when we want fish, La llorraine, pale and haughty, kisses Manon on the brow and goes out to pawn the Crown Jewels; then she brings home the fish and chips in a piece of newspaper, and we sit down to enjoy it while she tells us sniggering anecdotes of fifth-rate music halls."

"Look here," demanded Cliffe, striding into the room, "I've been interviewing your brother, Deb, and he says that little bit of mange who calls himself Otto Redbury is responsible for our good name dragged in the mud. He says that verminous Dutchman called on your father full of a 'brivate peesiness' just before the row. What I want to know is, *who told him?* And a rumour has got about that you committed suicide last Friday night. That's not exactly funny, is it? We've got to track those scandals to their sources. You don't seem to realize how serious it is. Our honour is at stake!"

"It's so good of you to include mine," Deb said meekly. "Sit down, Cliffe, and don't rave. I suppose I started them myself!" And she related her dramatic confession to Samson Phillips. And Cliffe listened, frowning.

"But this is all hypothesis. You mentioned no names to Phillips. You didn't actually specify that night at Seaview. I'm not reproaching you for the lie itself, Deb—that was merely silly; feminine boasting. But Otto must have got his definite facts from someone else, and I've written him an imperative letter on the subject. It begins: 'Sir'"

"That's not highly striking or original in itself, Cliffe. Why not 'Honey?'"

Antonia laughed. "Tell us Otto's answer when you get it, Cliffe. I respect you for taking a strong line!" But Cliffe did not show them the reply he received from Otto; he studied it in solitude and bewildered indignation. What could the man mean by reminding him of a certain conversation in the Tube? He recalled, with an effort, having once travelled in Otto's company, and having talked a great deal of fantastic rubbish for Otto's benefit, but he was quite sure that not the veriest scavenger could have picked Deb's name from among the rubbish-heap—"I've always been very careful over names. . . ."

o

II

Deb, taking her present emancipation as a vantage-point for a survey of her past, as a whole and in segments and phases, arrived at a conclusion that the general inadequacy on the amorous side was due to foolish compromise. She made up her mind, therefore, to reform, and be bad—thoroughly bad. In the episode with Samson she had proved to herself that she was no longer fit for the conventional extreme of respectful love and sheltered marriage. Her dilatory sense of daring must therefore be flogged to that other far extreme—"I hate betwixts and betweens!"

A little balm of self-deception had to be applied. Hitherto she had been more or less under home supervision; not stringent supervison, certainly; but a background of loving trust was a hindrance in itself. Now the trust had been withdrawn—and the background. Now she was on her own—free—disillusioned—slightly embittered—(Deb prodded the embitterment anxiously—yes, it was still there. . . .) Now she was twenty-five and at the cross-roads——

Deb did not realize the truism that even as every woman's life holds material for one novel, so that generic novel may generically and with perfect application bear the title: "Cross-roads."

She had been on the look out for the hero to her heroine, and he had failed in the appointment. Now she was in search for the villain to her adventuress, and it seemed at first as though he would prove equally elusive. A series of minor experiments left her seriously convinced that in choice of a villain, a young girl cannot be too careful. . . . "He must make it worth while——" Perhaps after all she was still on the same old quest translated into different terms.

Meanwhile, the winter passed; and early spring woke her slightly bilious soul to fretfulness. Her habits had slackened to harmony with her environment of cosmopolitan bohemianism; but whereas a bed erected in the Venetian drawing-room and covered by day with a priceless piece of embroidery, seemed to La Ilorraine all that was necessary in the way of a tiring-room—"My dee-urr, you can use Manon's mirror as your own—it goes without saying——" yet Deb was not quite happy at the general sloppiness of tea-gowns and mysterious foreigners and rich meals at all hours—or at no

hours—Carmen for breakfast, Tosca for supper, and out-of-season dishes in between—music-hall managers strolling in to slap "my good llorraine" familiarly between the shoulders, and look avariciously at Manon, who, however, a child of mummers and motley, was interrogated with a strictness which Deb, daughter of strictest Israel, would never for a moment have suffered. But La llorraine knew more of her world and was wiser in education than Ferdinand Marcus; La llorraine, who sometimes put on enormous horn spectacles and sat knitting by the fire; and sometimes rose up like a prophetess and tossed a pair of desperate arms to Heaven, in denunciation of *that* war which prevented return to a beloved continent which knew something of good music; La llorraine was equally genuine and lovable in either mood; and Deb grew to be sincerely fond of her. But Manon was another matter; Manon, at eighteen, held to her pose of exiled princess, a slender figure in the vast loneliness of the drawing-room—a lonely little heart mysteriously unsoiled by contact with aforesaid mummers and motley. She listened charmingly when Deb scattered ethics of rebellion; she appeared slightly shocked when decorum demanded that she should be shocked—and yet—and yet—for all the demureness of reproving eyelash and "Oh, but, Deb——" in the pretty lisping accent, Deb could not be rid of an impression that when it came to it, Manon would go further and fare a great deal better than herself. Manon had hitched her wagon to a fixed star, whereas it looked as though Deb had hitched hers to a travelling circus.

"We've had enough of this," exclaimed Antonia, an unexpected visitor after a tour in the car which had lasted the whole of February—"Not dressed yet? and it's nearly twelve o'clock; sluggish appetite?—no wonder, if you smoke scented cigarettes with your coffee and eggs. Even as I prophesied!"

"Don't be hard on me," Deb pleaded; "I'm not entirely dead to better things—really, Antonia. I feel the call of Spring urging me out and out. . . . Let's go to a cinema, shall we?"

"On the contrary, we shall gird up our loins and do war-work, my child," grimly. "We shall speak to our mothers and ask them what particular niche is vacant for one willing but ignorant daughter of pleasure, and we shall send word of the result by this evening latest. And meanwhile, we will withdraw our plaits that writhe like blue-black serpents among

the exquisite but macabre foliage of last year's tablecloth, and put away the dregs of green chartreuse, and sit up and comb ourselves out, and try to be a credit to a nation at war."

Deb laughed and said she was quite willing to do war-work, and had meant to enrol herself since some time, but had thought it too late. . . .

" Oh, I think the war may be trusted to last another month or two."

" I meant," in fractious explanation, " that it always seems to me too late to do something afterwards which one hasn't done before."

" Lazy little Oriental. . . . You will visit my mother at 6 p.m. precisely this evening and receive your instructions," with which Antonia departed.

" Blair Stevenson is said to be coming back to the Foreign Office " was the sub-conscious wriggle of motive underlying her sincere belief that Deb would be the better for a more strenuous existence.

For Blair Stevenson, in the Diplomatic Service, was Gillian's friend ; Antonia liked him, appreciating to the full his supple wit and undeniably perfect breeding ; his pursuit of her was ardent enough for her to enjoy keenly the sensation of flying . . . he never drew near, and presently the pursuit slackened ; he was sent abroad—British Resident of some West African province ; and when he returned, fell easily into place as one of her group—an excellent occasional. Antonia was aware that he was still on good terms with Gillian . . . and that if accidentally he met Deb there—" What does it matter ? " But the fierce desire persisted to keep the child . . . pure.

The eventful climax of the meeting between Gillian and Deb on Zoe's doorstep, Antonia accepted quietly and almost with relief. It had happened, and there was no more to be done—by her at least. A week afterwards she was forced to leave London—her Major-General was perpetually touring and inspecting and dashing hither and thither. Deb in her letters had spoken no further word of Gillian (Deb was afraid, as a matter of fact, knowing Antonia's probable state of mind), but Gillian, in divine unconsciousness, dashed off a hasty postcard on which " dear Deb," struck out, was replaced by " dear Antonia." It was probably the only card Gillian could find amongst the frenzied litter on a desk which Winifred ought to have kept tidy . . . but it told Antonia all she wanted to

know—all that she did not want to know: Deb and Gillian were getting on nicely. . . .

And now Blair was returning. For all her liking of Blair's society, she infinitely preferred him in Greece, where he was at least safe from the result of Cliffe's parties or Gillian's introductions. . . . Antonia could not be for ever vigilant . . . the Major-General was beckoning once more——

And then came that sunny letter from Cliffe Kennedy informing her of a marvellous studio party he had arranged. "I borrowed your studio as usual, and you can have Seaview in the summer whenever you want it. These are little eddies of communal brotherhood that one day will unite to a surging river that will sweep away, etc.——"

Antonia skipped a page or two till the names she sought, dreading to find, sure to find, sprang at her from the page—"Blair Stevenson—Deb. . . ."

. . . "I had a sort of presentiment that something was bound to happen if I brought those two together. . . . And again, Antonia, my experimental nerve had twitched to some purpose. Bet you a copy of the Omar Khayyam (I've got seventy-two) that this fusion of personalities will have Results—dramatic or beautiful or horrid. . . . Do come home and join the audience—I'm so excited."

III

Deb, entirely absorbed in her canteen work, had given up scanning the horizon for the villain of the piece; so that it was with a shock that she looked up and found him standing quite close to her, waiting for his cue. . . . Almost she hoped that he would prove not worth while. . . . Those nights under the gaunt station roof, watching the restless watchers for the leave train, watching the grimy burdened soldiers tumble with dazed eyes out of their compartments on to the platform . . . till roused to the necessity for rapid mechanical dole of coffee and sandwiches—wash up—start afresh—hour after hour. . . . These nights had become more real than the arrangement and re-arrangement of her own temperament.

But Blair was so definitely worth while that Deb dared not refuse him as a prospective—what? The old dream was dead, of course . . . dream of the big thing—husband who

knew of all her past idiocies, and called her a goose and laughed at her, and understood ; small sturdy boy in a dark blue jersey and rumpled hair several shades too light for such a brown skin. . . . " You are being not only sentimental, but also futile ! " she informed herself. " Next there will be pretty fancies all about a dream-garden "—and straightway there was the garden, at the magical hour of after-tea when the grass looks as though it had been freshly painted, and the canterbury bells are adrip from recent watering. . . .

Sternly Deb removed husband, child and garden by the dream-scruff of their dream-necks,—she sought for some delicate means to enlighten Blair Stevenson of her willingness to—to——

Self-communion slurred over the verbal expression of good —or bad—intent. For it refused to present itself with more elegance than " to go the whole hog "—and such blatant slang did not associate itself readily with Blair's personality.

" To fulfil my womanhood,"—but that sounded priggish. " To tread the primrose path " was affectation. " To take a lover " was the final selection—but still imperfect. She chose it for the sake of the word " lover " which still hummed to her on that deep sonorous note of wind along the wires . . . " lover."

Meanwhile, her watchfulness lay in ambush for that splendid flare of passion which was to be her impetus and justification. She had a passionate temperament. . . . How could it be otherwise, with those eyelids and that mouth ? Men and women alike had accused her of hot Eastern blood ; insisted upon it ; warned her, laughing or in envy, of the penalties. She accepted this established version of herself in an unquestioning spirit.

" Child, you'd lead a man to hell ! " a victim had once foretold. Now she waited for a man to lead her to hell. She could at least be assured that Blair Stevenson would instinctively and unostentatiously choose quite the least travelled and the most refined and expensive route thither. He was that kind of man ; with a reputation, but not a vulgar one, for success with women. Deb, seeking to express crudely the sense he aroused of having dipped to her class from that elusive class which lies midway between the upper middle-class and the aristocracy, told herself in confidence that he made her feel not unlike a housemaid being took notice of by one of the

quality. Hitherto, most of the men with whom she had come in contact, could be tabulated as solid business or professional—like Samson or her own father; or else urged by the prevalent rebellion to type, into the artist or vagabond pose—like Cliffe Kennedy.

Blair Stevenson was of such excellent family that he never mentioned his family; probably most of it was extinct, and the rest knew better than to encircle him save at a distance. He had travelled extensively both in cities and in the wilds, so that he combined cosmopolitan ease with the British knack of being able to cope with emergencies. Although he was not much more than thirty-five, the Foreign Office had already recognized his perfect tact and suavity, combined with knowledge of languages, to be extremely useful to them; so that he was accounted one of those mysterious beings "in the know"; "behind the scenes"; one of the men who "pulled strings." . . . He had been entrusted with a rather tricky mission to the Balkans, prior to his present leave. His natural appendages and equipments one would assume to be a faithful valet in his town chambers, a faithful *maître d'hotel* in every capital, and a faithful mistress no one knows where; because Stevenson, though ardent, was discreet where women were concerned; but certainly the carriage of her head proclaimed her exquisite breeding, and she cost him a great deal of money. . . .

And all this about him, speculative and positive, did not quite convey why Deb was not always sure (metaphorically) how to use her knives and forks in his presence. Easy to make mistakes—tiny, silly mistakes of conduct or subtlety—and read in his eyes a dawning recognition that she was not quite "it" after all, or his amusement perhaps at her quaint lapses from sophistication: "Am I an amateur compared with what he's accustomed to?" Then angrily: "Oh, he swanks, and I'm a snob!" which was inaccurate. He took "form" for granted, and she was shaky about it. Blair Stevenson could be relied on for good manners; not so much the surface good manners connected with the graceful opening of doors for the lady's exit, but the more fundamental good manners which broke a heart as a heart would most wish to be broken.

IV

"I've waited long enough," said Deb.

It suddenly frightened her that again she was hesitating too long; that decision was wearing thin and threadbare with the days. . . . Perhaps Blair had not realized . . . it must be puzzling for a man nowadays to differentiate between the merely good; the frankly bad; the good trying to be bad; and the bad resolved to be good.

"I suppose he needs what Aunt Trudchen used to call 'a little encouragement,'" Deb reflected.

Then by what sign could she convey to him that her intentions were dishonourable? They had, of course, dispassionately talked of sex, which is the weather-subject of to-day's men and girls. . . . Deb was afraid, standing on tiptoe to the clubman and the cosmopolitan, that she might have given an excessive impression of sophistication; and that he was inwardly astonished, now, that she delayed to pass him some customary code-word or countersign necessary to his advancement. She had not the faintest idea what was expected of her, so she essayed a semi-confidence in La llorraine.

That royal veteran of a more clear-headed period, when courtesans were expected to know their alphabet, could not fail to be good-humouredly contemptuous at the spectacle of these children playing their variations of an old game with such quaint and ponderous seriousness; and getting so very little out of it in the way of genuine passion, genuine fun, and ermine cloaks.

Out of the question, certainly, that Manon should join these games. But Deb was six years older and had "made a muff from her chances," as Manon would never be permitted to do. Moreover, Deb was not La llorraine's own daughter. . . . So La llorraine shrugged her shoulders, and gave her the necessary tip.

Deb was on her way to call upon Blair Stevenson unexpectedly at his rooms in Jermyn Street. It was a quarter past ten in the evening, and because she had just been relieved from duty at Victoria Station, she was wearing a long disguising cloak over silk garments that slip on the skin with a suggestion of suave fingers. Blair was at home—she had telephoned during the day, and, preserving an incognito, had asked the

valet what would be the best time to telephone again ? The valet said : " I believe that ten o'clock to-night will be most likely to find Mr Stevenson." . . . Blair would realize the significance of her visit ; and—and once lifted to response, her fatal temperament could be relied upon to do the rest.

" I've waited long enough. Oh, suppose I waited till nobody wanted me any more, and then I wanted it more than anything else. . . ."

She leant against the door for a pause of short, quick breathing. The neighbourhood, the steps and passages, the windows, were all discreet good form, world of the clubman, the cosmopolitan, the man who knows . . . utterly alien world to the forlorn little virgin, who stands, suddenly erect and stiff and pearly-white ; thumb pressed firmly on the bell-button of No. 141B.

. . . . . .

" It's *now*. . . ."

Queer—never before had she realized the present so vividly ; " it has been a minute ago," " it will be the day after tomorrow " . . . but " It's now," as Blair, with a smile and a subtle look, threw away his half-smoked cigar, took the half-finished cup of coffee from her hands.

" Now—now——"

She was one pulse that beat for initiation. Her cheap artist fancy had always decorated the temple of initiation so heavily with incense and tiger-skins and divans and rose-leaves, all the crude stock and properties of rapture, that the reality of this ordinary room, big leather arm-chairs and a few prints on the plain dark walls, and a bookcase, and several ash-trays scattered about, this so essentially a man-room, left her disappointed. Had she relied too much upon the trappings ? . . . but—Blair had taken her in his arms, *now*. . . .

And still no response from that—that most damnably sluggish temperament.

Very precisely and dispassionately she noticed for the first time that one of his lids lay over the eye with a heavier slouch than the other. She was pleased with the behaviour of his face under stress of emotion . . . it did not grow hot nor red nor damp ; the veins did not bulge ; his breath was under control. She had been right in her selection of Blair Stevenson —but—but——

The ungrateful temperament, which she had provided with the best advantages, was failing her utterly. . . .

She kissed his exacting lips with as much of faked ecstasy as she could coax to her aid, and then wondered, supposing she laughed,—the word ecstasy always made her want to laugh—if that indecorum could be passed off as further ecstasy?

And all this time she did Stevenson the injustice of believing him imperceptive.

"Deb . . . my dear. . . ."

He had from the beginning philosophically summed her up as incapable of extremes. But it was not as though he were dependent. . . . He did not love Deb; he was a little bit in love with her; and she was elfish, delicate, captivating, freshly surprising at each encounter, like in June the first strawberry whose unremembered flavour one has taken for granted through the winter months. Yes, she was charming. And he was wrong in his estimate of her. After all, she had come to him——

One tiny gesture of his—and Deb's histrionics lay shattered like a wave into foam. . . .

"No . . . no . . . no—not *now*. . . . Oh, *please*!"

A moment later, and Blair said, from the other end of the room: "There was no need for that 'please,' dear. The first 'no' would have been enough."

She lay angrily sobbing, hair not even disordered, her drapings of pale ninon shamefully untumbled. The desperate encounter had yielded her one scrap of self-knowledge—nothing else: That she was not in the least passionate by nature, and that only love could raise her nature to passion; that she had been misled all her life by a mere illusion deduced by herself and others from her face and her way of moving, and her recklessness of speech and her Jewish pliability. . . . To her mother who was a Gentile, was due this slight chilliness, blown like a hoar-frost over what might otherwise have been an exotic blossoming.

And the man by the window murmured: "'To play at half a love with half a lover,' . . . is that what you wanted, child, and couldn't express? I didn't understand. Well——"

He crossed again to the couch and stood looking down upon her, hands clasped behind his back, mouth bent to a whimsical smile—"Well—It's not too late, is it?"

For that explanation both solved the enigma of her visit, and coincided with his former conception of her. The surprise had been her acquiescence, not her rebuff.

She looked up at him pitifully, and shook her head. . . . His mouth grew hard: if not mistress, nor demi-maid, then what did she expect he would make of her? Surely she could not be hoping. . . . Blair Stevenson's wife, if ever materialized from wraithdom, would not be the sort of girl who came to his rooms alone at 10.15 p.m. Nor would his mistress —she not at all a wraith—plead to leave them again after a futile half-hour of compromise. No, Deb (and he still thought her charming) was qualified not for chastity nor for fierce desire. . . . What did she want of him?

Her intuition leapt to what was passing in his mind; and in stinging agony that he should behold in her a huntress for a likely husband, she said quickly—"I did—I *did* want to play—only to play. But—you frightened me. . . ."

"Forget that. I'm getting old and dense. And all men try . . . once, you know. But it's all right, Deb. . . ."

It was all right—now; at the demi-price of her demi-virtue, she had saved at least that tattered beggar-maid she still called her pride. "I believe you thought I had come with a matrimonial lasso coiled up in my hand," she taunted him.

And Blair was deceived, for all his penetration. How was he to know, indeed, that daringly as she had repudiated his suspicion, in a little backwater of thought trembled still an eddy from old times and old traditions: "It—would—have—been—rather nice . . . to marry him. . . ." But you have just proved you are not in love with him. "Oh—that kind of thing—wouldn't matter. I believe it would grow of itself . . . if he were looking after me." Her set smile curved into real merriment as it struck her how Samson would approve of these sentiments. Perhaps she and Samson were kindred souls, after all!

But Samson would most certainly not have approved of her present abandonment to a demi-lover. She lay with an apathetic hand straying over his hair and eyebrows, wondering a little at the hard cheek pressed close to hers, wondering a little . . . how soon she could say it was time to go, whether there were any letters waiting for her at home, if that pale young lance-corporal who had fainted as she put the coffee-cup into his hands, had recovered yet; wondering a little, as

Blair shifted their positions, and drew her head down to where his shirt opened on to his heart—Did Blair really enjoy this? ought she not to say she was uncomfortable and had a crick in her neck? Whether she were now what is called a sinner? —*pêcheresse* in French . . . or was it *pêcheuse*? one of them meant the "fisherman's wife"—she remembered that from school—yes, *pêcheuse*, surely—they were taught to tell the difference by the resemblance of the circumflex to the roof of the fisherman's hut. The other has an accent aigü—but Deb had never been quite able to disentangle a vague notion that a fisherman's wife was also a sinner. *Pêcheuse—pêcheresse* . . .

She wondered anew if that monstrosity on the wall opposite were a Hogarth? if her watch would be mended by to-morrow, as the man at the shop had faithfully promised? . . .

"Are you happy, you small white Deb?

She sighed "Yes. . . ."

"You must come to me often now we understand each other. . . ."

And again: "Yes . . . often. . . ."

CHAPTER II

I

ANTONIA stood in the empty room in Bayswater, reading a scrawl of explanation which Gillian had left behind for her on the dusty mantelpiece. The floor was littered with bits of straw and string, a broken teacup, some torn-up MSS., an old stocking and a tin of Bluebell polish . . . her foot struck against the latter, and it rolled towards the tin fender and stopped with a forlorn clank. . . .

"My dear—I've decided to go and live with Theo—why not? You'll find me here if you come this afternoon, 54 Middle Inn Gardens. I'm leaving behind a bottle of Elliman's Embrocation, because I haven't room for it. Bring it along, and anything else you see lying about. Yours, Jill."

"So she's done it at last." Slowly Antonia left the house, came back for the Embrocation, could not find it, and went on to Middle Inn Square with the Bluebell polish as a substitute. With an air more than ever slim and defiant and passion-free, she swung into Gillian's presence——

"Jill!"

"It was—this—or sharing him with fifty others," the culprit explained coolly. She did not look in the least like the famous bacteriologist, as she sat astride a wooden packing-case, tugging with giant pincers at a refractory nail; hair rakish from the frequent tumbling of her fingers; eyes two greenish slits of roguery; cigarette tilted well upwards from the corner of her mouth. She did not look like a heroine of passion either. . . . Her blouse was open and her sleeves rolled up, and her short navy-blue skirt was smeared with white where she had leant against some wet paint.

"You can help me unpack while you disapprove. That lazy little cat Winnie has gone off to spend the day with Camellia."

"Winnie? She's still with you?"

"My dear, what was I to do with her? I couldn't send her

home again just because of a whim of mine. It wouldn't be fair. She isn't happy at home——"

Antonia sat down helplessly. "A year ago Deb gets turned out of home, plus an income. Now you elope, plus Winifred Potter. You're a pair to make any friend of yours hysterical. . . ."

"A little more, and I'd have despatched Winifred labelled right-side-up as a farewell present to you," Gillian retorted grimly. "But she'll do for Theo to flirt with in his lighter moments."

"Theo's are mostly lighter moments, aren't they? Jill, I wouldn't have minded the sacrifice; I wouldn't have said a single word . . . if he'd been worthy." She was ice-white with the conviction of his unworthiness.

Gillian said nothing for a minute or two. She still sat bent over the packing-case, one leg on either side of it, wrenching at the wood. Then: "Much need for sacrifice with a man who's worthy!"

"Then you admit he isn't?" Antonia sprang up. "Oh, Gillian, if you *must* try a theory——"

"Theory? Good Lord! Nothing of that sort. It's just that Theo isn't big enough or good enough, if you like, to remain faithful and decent and honourable to a woman who's only his spiritual love. Why pretend?—we all know what Theo is!" she shrugged her thin shoulders and flashed a wide smile up at her friend—"He's clever—with a sort of malicious destructive cleverness. Otherwise just an amorous gutter-snipe, who can't resist anything of the other sex—a Zoe in male. His reputation is a joke—I've heard scores of people chuckling over the latest Theo Pandos story."

"You know this—and still——"

"I know it—and because. He won't do without the others—but he can't do without me. Look here, you blooming Artemis, I justify myself to you just this once and never again. Understand this. That little rotter is my . . . completion, if you like; the answer to my special quantity of X. It's a pity, I'm sure, that it didn't happen to be someone grand and distinguished and austere, who'd spend all day long renouncing me, and all night long being nobly glad that he did so. Can you see Theo being glad he's renounced anyone, ever?" again the swift joyous grin. . . . Antonia could not help returning it.

" Theo's got a wife, I believe ? "

" Oh, curse her, yes. A Spanish Catholic who won't divorce him. A dark flashing thing who looks all passion and Carmen and castanets. She's no earthly use to him."

" Gillian, you're a thoroughly immoral creature ! "

" I'm not going to be one of a crowd. 'Tisn't good for the self-respect. And it isn't good for Theo—Oh, I've no illusions about my young man. . . . It amounts to this—I'm fed up with the type of woman who can't sling sex out of her mind. The mind isn't the proper place for sex. I want my mind for my work. Enforced virginity, not chosen, mind you, but enforced, is unbalancing ; it hangs about and takes up more room than it ought to. . . . My work has got to come to fruition sooner or later . . . and all this has got to be cleared out of the way, somehow, first. Theo is thoroughly unsuitable, he's younger than I am, he's married, he's fast and horrid . . . granted !—but Theo is a factor that can't be slung out. So he's got to stay—with as little fuss as possible. I thought about it all hard, and when last night I'd decided, I packed, and I came. Poor old Theo . . ." and she chuckled softly as at some memory of the preceding evening—but her brows were contracted with pain.

" Wasn't he terrifically glad, at least ? "

" Oh—glad enough. But just last night . . . it was—awkward. I ought to have 'phoned him beforehand—See ? Antonia, you're shrinking like bad material in the wash ! "

" Bad material perhaps—but not in the wash . . . at the present moment ! "

" Cue for a wince from the fallen woman ! Frankly, are my affairs as unsavoury as all that ? "

" Not you, Jill. Never you, but Theo. He's your demon."

" Not much demon about him when he hung from the left foot on to the right at his front door last night, and I sat demurely on my trunk outside. . . . If the Bacteriological Society could have seen me—I'm lecturing there next week ! I'm what Theo had been waiting and longing for since three and a half years, and coming just then—for once even he wasn't able to carry it off. Zoe would have chucked the incubus through a door, or into a cupboard, or under the bed, and turned up smiling—Theo just stood staring at me with the tears streaming down his face. . . . My beloved little cad ! . . . So I went home again, and returned this morning—

Antonia, you're *not* to look like that!" in a spasm of fury. "Didn't I know he'd get rid of her not ten minutes after I left. . . ."

"Oh, I suppose he said he had," scornfully.

Gillian raged more. "You'd have sheered off and never looked at him again. 'For better, for *worse*' . . . Without the marriage service read over me, I can keep to it as well as any of you. It's Theo as he is—not Theo transformed by Maskelyne and Devant into a young bride's dream. We shall live together quite openly; of course, without any blaze of trumpets—but concealment means a flurry again, and a furtive askew-over-your-shoulder look that I don't approve of. Thank goodness, my private life, as I choose to hack it out, can't interfere with my especial career. If I'd been a doctor, as I intended——"

"Then you would have had to give up Theo."

"I've just spent twenty minutes patiently explaining—I s'pose you weren't listening—that if I gave up Theo, he'd take up far too much of my time and thought and vitality and saneness. To live with him is the only way of getting rid of him—mentally."

"It's such a twisted, new-fashioned way of arguing."

"New-fashioned? because I want *my* man in *my* home—" for an instant Gillian was wrapped in swift strong beauty.

"And—my child, too?"

"No," softly. "Not that. One is just decent enough, I hope, to consider the possible preference of the child to remain unborn—Hullo, Theo!" as that gentleman stood on the threshold of a room demoralized by Gillian's advent to an imitation of a charity bazaar after three days' vending.

"We have all heard of the magic womanly touch which brings divine order into a bachelor's dreary untidy chambers," he pattered impudently, "But the reality is beyond all expectation. For pity's sake, Gillian, let us go to a hotel for the rest of our lives. What have you done with my poor Silvester?

"Your valet, adoring me with every breath he draws, has gone out to pick some wild flowers for me to arrange on our dinner table. . . . You shall have your Patmore angel-in-the-house all right! Going, Antonia?"

"Miss Verity is hating me too much for perfect comfort," murmured Pandos with humorous resignation.

She flashed him back look for look, and went out.

. . . Then the man crossed the room and knelt beside the packing-case and thrust his head in Gillian's lap . . . his dark sloe eyes worshipped her; his nerves, of matted vibrating wires, were lulled to perfect rest—perfect content. . . . No strain between these two, of pretence or concealment or fear—Gillian had taken him for what he was.

CHAPTER III

I

"If it gets any hotter, I shall be found melted down in one of my own crucibles," Gillian wailed, to the accidental party of Deb, Nell and Antonia, who had flopped in to see her after a succession of stifling days at the latter end of July.

Antonia was temporarily freed from service by an attack of malaria on the part of her General. And Deb explained that since a couple of weeks Nell was working as her fag at the station canteen whence they had just come.

"Winifred, I wish you'd try for all our sakes to get a little thinner; the mere sight of you in weather like this is trying—especially since you spell your name with such a lot of extra letters."

"Why, what difference can that make?" from Winnie, quite happy on the divan.

Gillian demanded sympathy from the company: "It's that Camellia woman puts morbid ideas into her head. She's told her that Winifred is a degeneration of a beautiful old Saxon name, and we're gradually Saxonizing it back again to its original condition. We spell it W y n n e f r w d d e now."

"It's unrecognizable," Deb laughed. "I'll take to the divan on the strength of it. . . . I'm exhausted—we had an awful hustle up at the canteen." She carelessly rolled the astonished Winifred on to the floor, and took her place among Theo's treasured purple and peacock cushions—"Don't you know, Winnie, that if we were in Germany, you, as an unimportant spinster, would have no right at all to the sofa, which is strictly reserved for the matron?"

"Well, but you're not married either," the victim of the evacuation argued slowly. "We none of us are except Gillian, and she isn't really."

Gillian twinkled across at Deb: "Well, how would the Germans cope with the problem of somebody who isn't married really? Would they give me the sofa?"

"They'd give you the boot; and me too. There are no fine semi-shades abroad. A girl is good till she is slightly bad, and then she's accepted as completely bad and damned everlastingly. Here, a girl can be badder and badder, if she doesn't break the last rule of all—and then be accepted as completely good again at any time she wants to—like Manon. She's engaged to Dolph Carew, you know. He's been left pots of money by his uncle. . . ."

Antonia said contemptuously: "Manon is the epitome of the saying; 'If you can't be good, be careful!' She's been careful and she's got her reward. . . ."

"And she's enjoyed her nineteen years into the bargain. But maidenhood has a market value, and Manon has known that from the cradle. Not from La Iloraine; she's no ready reckoner—much too generous."

Gillian asked: "Carew has been married before, hasn't he? What was his first wife like?"

And Antonia and Deb exchanged a long glance. Then the latter spoke softly. "Jenny was good—but not careful. . . . I've been thinking about her rather a lot, lately. . . ."

"She was too good by a thousand miles to be Manon's predecessor," murmured Antonia.

Gillian, suddenly standing up, flung away her jersey, revealing only a camisole beneath. Then she unfastened the safety-pin that clipped her skirt together. "That's better. I believe scraggy people feel the heat more than fat ones—I do really. It seems to get so quickly at our bones and grill them. Which is hotter, sizzled flesh or grilled bones? Winnie, I appeal to you?"

"I was just wondering. . . ." Winnie began, as usual ten minutes behind in the conversation—"What Deb meant by——"

A violent peal at the bell stopped her.

"I can't be bothered to dress all over again for that. Answer it, Deb!"

"Let me," pleaded Nell. She had been lumped on the floor, somewhere near Gillian's feet, gazing steadily upwards at that young woman's face. Now, in an agony lest someone not herself should have this chance of doing a service to her goddess, she scrambled up, threw a look of fierce dark reproach in Deb's direction, and rushed to the front door, colliding with Silvester's dignified progress through the hall.

"Oh——" they heard Nell's affrighted gasp, "do forgive me—I—I—didn't know!"

"Lord," whispered Gillian—"I forgot we have a staff. I'm always forgetting. Poor Nell, this is enough to put her out of gear for a fortnight——"

"It doesn't matter at all, Miss," graciously from the valet.

"Not a bit—I mean thanks awfully," Nell's assent came in a gasping torrent. Then she darted back into the room, back to her place on the rug, and sat glowering. Nobody dared speak . . .

II

It had been several months before Nell would consent at all to meet the illustrious Gillian Sherwood: "She won't want to meet me—I'm too stupid—I shall hate her—I hate people who ask me questions. . . .."

"But why *should* she ask you questions, for goodness sake?" Deb had retorted, exasperated. "She's not a County Council examiner."

"She will, I know she will. She knows all sorts of brilliant people and she discovers diseases for the papers, so she can't want me so dreadfully badly."

"But people needn't want each other dreadfully badly to just meet in the ordinary way."

"I hate meeting anyone in the ordinary way," perversely. And Antonia, who was present, had laughed, and told Deb to leave the shy baby alone. So that it was a shock of astonishment to Antonia when Gillian, after a recent accidental encounter, was straightway enthroned as Nell's deity. . . .

"She's a sweet kid, but she wrings one dry," was the deity's confidential version to Deb. "She writes to me every day, long unpunctuated letters all about whether certain people make you feel certain feelings, and other feelings make you see certain colours, and certain people make you see red. . . . And then she comes to see me, and says 'I didn't want to come really—You didn't want me, did you?' And I have to be hectic——"

"And she says: 'Yes, but you don't say that as if it was real,'" Deb guessed.

"Oh, Deb, what shall I do with her? One can almost love the child and one wouldn't hurt her for worlds, but we sit in

long heavy muffled impenetrable silences like slow sinking into a feather bed . . . and then she shoots out at me ' You're different to-day somehow, aren't you ? ' And I guiltily try to be the same, but I don't know what to be the same as. And I get a swift brown look and : ' What are you thinking of ? '—When ten to one I'm not thinking of anything worth while—well, I mean nothing she'd like me to be thinking of. So I say, ' One can't always tell one's thoughts and feelings, can one ? ' ' No—but one would like to, wouldn't one ? At least I suppose mine aren't up to much. . . . But I wonder——' "

" And you say ' What ? ' and she says ' Nothing '—and then it begins all over again. I'm sorry, Jill ; I let you in for this."

" Don't blame yourself. She saps my strength rather, but I'm fond of young Nell, and she's lovely to look at—as Timothy Fawcett seems to have found out."

" They never get any forrarder though, do they ? "

" Bless him—and bless them both. They can afford to waste three or four years in being shy. Theo and I did."

Deb laughed outright at the comparison of the two wooings. . . . " I wonder——"

" What ? "

" Nothing ! "

" You're as bad as Nell ! "

But Deb was wondering what effect Gillian's pioneer boldness might have on the psychology of her disciple.

III

Nell sat glowering . . . and the other three girls were sympathetically silent, listening the while to Zoe's voice hailing Silvester as " Bob " and eagerly enlightening him as to the adventures and whereabouts of a certain " Guiseppi " who was evidently an intimate acquaintance of a mutual past. . . .

" She's the Socialist in sex par excellence," murmured Gillian, " a reproof to all us snobs. . . ." And then Zoe bubbled into the room.

" Gillian, isn't it too funny for words, I used to know your man quite well—at least I suppose he's your husband's man—at least I suppose he isn't your husband—but that isn't what I came to tell you. . . ."

"Anyway, I was aware of it already," Gillian laughed.

"What—about Pinto? My dear, how *could* you be—unless, of course, Cliffe told Antonia, and she told you? You know, Antonia, I never like to say anything and I'm very fond of Cliffe, but I do think he talks too much. . . . You remember that evening when Pinto went mad in my flat last year?"

"Will I ever forget it? and will your brother ever forget it, Deb? and will Captain Braithwaite and Mr Sam Wright and the little Belgian corporal ever forget it? Oh, and the macaroni merchant from round the corner—he had most cause to remember it, hadn't he? Did he ever get damages, by the way?

"Well, you can say what you like, Antonia, but though I was very angry with Pinto for the moment, I do honestly think he was perfectly right—in his own way. And I must say, I do like a man to assert himself. I mean, it's a sort of test, isn't it, Gillian, how much he really respects you, if it annoys him to find your room full of other men? especially—but that was what I was going to tell you." She unpinned the veil from her slanting sailor hat and adjusted the belt of her trim jacket . . . pulled forward a kiss-curl or two, dumped Quelle Vie into Nell's lap, whipped out some lurid red lip-salve and delicately outlined the curves of her mouth, and spun a provocative glance downwards at her flaunted silk ankles, as though they were another's, and she coveted them.

"Never mind all that, Zoe—Theo won't be in for ages. Tell us your news first."

Zoe opened her eyes. "Well, I must say, Jill, it's *not* like you to be spiteful. No, it isn't, and I'm disappointed. If Deb had made that remark, I wouldn't have been. . . ."

"Thanks," from a drowsy but grateful Deb on the divan. While Gillian, in whose wide frankness had lurked not a germ of spite, gazed helplessly at the ruffled little soubrette; and then, suddenly understanding, apologized.

Zoe kissed her. "All right, dear. 'The mind knoweth not its own cattiness.' Well, about Pinto——"

She described at length how a very contrite Pinto had yesterday turned up at the flat, tendering his usual olive-branch—a jar of olives—with the explanation of the occasion when he had overheard, in a café in Paris, two subalterns discussing his fiancée by name, over a letter presumably from

Cliffe, containing the advice to think about her no more, for she was being kept by a man with the face of an orang-outang and the temper of a Patagonian savage. . . .

"And I do think it's the most pathetic thing I've ever heard, don't you, Antonia?—that the poor darling never recognized himself, but thought I was being untrue to him with another man while he was away. Yes, I really do think it justifies his annoyance that time. . . . I *like* a man to have a spirit of his own, whatever you may say. And now he's at last had it out with Cliffe, and we're engaged again, and I've promised him all sorts of things, I forget what——"

"I'd try and remember, if I were you. One of them might be important."

"Deb, you've got a perfectly horrid mind. . . . I've promised him, of course, not to answer advertisements in the "Vie Parisienne," nor to accept wine—little things like that. And I think he's right, in a way, don't you?—because one never knows what may happen—though I do think Cliffe ought to think twice before he gossips about being 'kept,' because it's not a nice thing to say about one's friends, is it? I wonder if I shall ever meet those two subalterns—wouldn't you say they must have seen me somehow, and been rather smitten, for Cliffe to write like that and warn them off? But it was a funny coincidence, wasn't it, that Pinto should just have been sitting at the same time in the same café, so near their table? And I believe, though he didn't say so, that one of them was that perfectly dear lamb, Timothy Fawcett."

Antonia, to spare Nell's obvious confusion, asked: "Are you going to marry Pinto at last?"

"Good heavens, no! Marry a man with a temper like that? Quelle vie!—no, I wasn't talking to you, love!" as the spaniel sat up and barked. "But I'm used to being engaged to Pinto, and one misses it—besides, it's a sort of protection now I'm at the War Office. My dears, just listen. . . ."

They listened for about twenty minutes. And then Gillian said she might as well be suitably employed during the entertainment; and darted into the adjoining bedroom, whence she returned with an enormous pile of snowy but ragged underclothing and a cigar-box full of cottons.

And then even Zoe was silent and attentive before the spectacle of Gillian sewing. She had no scissors and no thimble, so she jabbed the needle on her knee to prick it through the

more resisting portions of material or lace, and left a length of thread hanging or else pulled at it—and pulled out the previous ten minutes' toil. She held her needle poised over an exquisite bit of embroidery, like a spade over a potato allotment—and then dug at it with grim energy. And she sighed and she swore and she struggled, and assaulted the tatters of fine lawn and crêpe-de-chine, till Antonia was moved to exclaim: "And these are the fingers that are noted for the most delicate experimental work in the entire Institute——"

Gillian spread out and ruefully surveyed the ten pricked and discoloured victims of her combined career as a woman and a professor of scientific research.

"One can't always be getting fresh underwear. It's such a fag. These were very expensive when I bought them; it's not so long ago—but I can never feel I'm in harmony with this sort of work. It's got to be done, though," and she thrust the eye of the needle anew towards the thread poised in her other hand.

Nell had been taught by her mother to sew beautifully, and sat wishing bashfully she had the courage to tender her gift at Gillian's shrine. She was, however, unable to articulate her ardent desire; and Winnie, whose plain purport in the house was solely to spare Gillian the present endurances, sat likewise passively watching the warfare in which the animate seemed likely to be defeated by the inanimate; advising at last: "Try holding them a different way, Jill. No, not the needle—*them*."

"Like this?" Gillian made an awkward bunch of the material in her fist. "But it feels all wrong now."

"Better give it up, Jill—throw it over to Winnie, she'll do it for you."

Winifred disregarded the hint. And Nell opened impulsive lips, made a sound in her throat, and thickened again to silence.

"I won't give up"—putting in stitches that were like a giant straddling from one edge of the rent to the other. "It's a nuisance, but I've got to learn," ferociously obstinate.

"Cleanliness is next to ungodliness," Antonia discovered with her aloof air of mingled amusement and disdain.

"Oh, cleanliness matters even in one's godly days. And softness. But when it comes to wheat-coloured or pale lilac ribbons drawn through, and the cling of faint scent and embroidered butterflies put on over the heart,—well, I do con-

sider Theo's extras take up rather a lot of time." And Gillian added with mournful honesty: "I never used to mind a hole or two!"

Winnie put in: "It doesn't matter in places that don't show. . . ."

"You never can be sure, though, can you, Winnie?" Deb teased her.

"Of course you can."

"Winnie, are all your flirtations strictly spiritual?"

"Don't be silly. One doesn't flirt with men who can't behave."

"Even the best behaved of men are liable to be carried away by their feelings."

Deb was naughtily poking up that layer of suburban respectability which was spread just underneath Winnie's ordinary girlish tendency for what she termed "larking about."

"A nice girl can always keep them in order," complacently. "I'm sure I'm fond enough of a bit of fun, nobody can call me a prude, but I always make a rule 'so far and no further.'"

Deb and Zoe joyously hurled themselves on the phrase: "*How* far is so far?—that's just it! define the limits of virtue, Winnie. *How* far before they mayn't go any further?"

And in spite of Winifred's indignant dodges and subterfuges, they succeeded in pinning her down at last to a hesitant declaration of principle. She affirmed that the parts which civilized raiment left exposed were for caresses—no harm in that: the face, the V of the neck, the arms below the elbow, hands and wrists. . . .

"And anything beyond is violation of neutral territory?"

Winnie wriggled ambiguously. "Of course, as soon as a fellow starts pulling you about, you know."

"Know what?"

"What he's after."

"What is he after?" Deb's voice was the perfection of innocent inquiry.

"Oh, I don't know. . . . You do worry, Deb. I've got along all right till now." Winnie's eyes were very round and puzzled. For the code of her class was not for analysis; a jumble of puritanism and prejudice and incurious sensuality. "But of course one has got to put a stop to it somewhere; mother wanted me to have a good time, and never bothered me much, but she did say that a chap, when he marries a girl,

likes to feel that he's the first. . . . Mother'd be shocked at you, Deb, I really do believe you've let a fellow"—her voice died away. And Deb said quickly, with averted head: "You believe I'd let a fellow go so far—and further, is that it?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'further'" Winifred retorted, pestered into a desire to get some of her own back. "You're so close about your love-affairs."

"Winnie, there was a time when I was a pure young girl, like you are now . . . and then something happened . . . in my life . . . and I've never been the same since, Winifred. I wonder if you'd understand if I told you."

"Oh, do!" gasped Winnie, her prudery delightedly offering itself to be shocked.

Zoe's voice was heard in the distance shrilling a duet of deathless memories with Silvester in the pantry.

"You couldn't do it if she were in the room—she wouldn't give you the chance," Gillian said, letting her lingerie fall from her lap in despair. "But as it is, Deb, I officially invite you to tell Winnie the Unofficial Story of your Life—it may widen her outlook. . . . We'll keep quite still, Antonia, Nell and I."

Deb began, hands clasped behind her head, eyes contracted as in dreamy contemplation of small figures specking a curly, dusty road:

"For the moment I can only remember John Thorpe and his mother's ear-trumpet. I was wildly infatuated with John Thorpe, so I used to ingratiate myself with his mother through her ear-trumpet. Not many people in the hotel would bother with that ear-trumpet, but I thought it was a short cut to Paradise. . . . Once I heard him bellowing to her in the strictest confidence that Ellaline had accepted him the night before. And I had to go on ingratiating myself down the ear-trumpet, because he and everybody would have noticed it if I'd suddenly left off. One has one's pride. . . . At the end of eleven days my throat was as sore as my soul . . . so I went to Germany on a visit and the war broke out. . . .

"And that was for me the dawn of love. . . .

"I can't keep to any chronological order, of course.

"The next thing that stands out is three minutes—well, it can hardly have been that. I'd gone to bed with a headache—not a very bad one; and when I heard Phil's voice in the hall—he'd motored over with a party—I wished I hadn't

pretended it was too bad to stay up. I heard him say: ' Where's my wife ? '—he always called me his wife. . . . They answered laughing, ' first floor, second door on the right '—the thud of his feet on the stairs. Then he was on the bed and had me and the quilt and the pillow all swept up and smothered up together in his arms. . . . I was simply dazed with his kisses—and with the hot tingling feel of his hands. He rushed downstairs again and I heard him explaining lightly to the others that he'd popped in his head at the door. He went abroad a little while after. . . .

" And I sometimes think that was for me the dawn of love."

" You let him come into your bedroom ? " panted Winnie. " You let a strange fellow sit—on—your—bed ? "

Deb went on as though she had not heard.

" When Louis Halliwell—yes, the music-hall song-and-patter star—motored me to the Kingston Empire that night of nights——"

" The *same* night ? " from Winnie, incredulously.

" Six years before—he promised me I should see life from behind the scenes. He kept his promise. I spent the evening in his dressing-room, watched him make up, heard him chaff with the other ' turns ' who drifted in and out. He drove me round to the digs of the Twin Acrobats, after the show, and they filled up a tumbler with port, and he told me in a whisper it was expected of bohemian palliness I should toss it off. . . . So I was half asleep coming home in the car, but I just remember he put my arm at the back of his waist and said it helped him drive if I kept it there. So I kept it there. On the doorstep he put his hands on my shoulders and said ringingly: " You're one of us *now*, Deb ! "—and kissed me, once, on the middle of my mouth. . . .

" That kiss was, for me, the dawn of love."

Winifred was so congealed to a solid state of astonishment, that when she said " Not again ? " it sounded quite calm.

" For cherry jam I'd do anything. That must be my excuse. For when Colville came back to me, married, and said I'd been his ideal on and off for seven years, and perhaps his wife would die, although he had a tendency to appendicitis, I thought I'd better discourage him. If he had died in my arms, Gillian, and there'd been an inquest, she couldn't have divorced him any more, could she ? But she might have got a Decree of the High Courts to haul in the cherry jam supposing he'd

made a will in my favour. Colville said: 'I paid 4s. 3d. a pound for it, Deb. I don't mind paying for what I want most. . . .' He looked meaning, and I looked far-away and said: 'There's—somebody—else—now. There wouldn't have been if you'd come last Tuesday." He groaned and asked me for a glove—as if one spoils a pair these days! So I laid my cheek for a brief-fleeting-space-of-time against the back of his hand, instead. It did just as well—but I do think he might have sent me a pot of the jam. But he said he couldn't get any out of the cellar without her seeing, even in a shrimping-net. He said he had thirty-seven pounds of it in the cellar.

"And that was, for me, the dawn of love. . . ."

Deb sighed.

"Pass over Padraic, the Sorrowful Celt, who used to keen and croon and lilt and lament rhythmically over the misery which would surely be my lot, till I felt like my own corpse privileged to attend my own wake. He would tell me long melancholy Irish stories about his long melancholy Irish friends, and they all sounded to me the same friend," Deb's voice rose and fell with the cadences of waves on the shore —"till at the very last, did I not hear myself fading to unreality as a legend of Eire, long and melancholy, re-told by him in the future to other friends, who would also become legends, who would all become the same harrowing, hopeless legend. . . .

"'But,' he said—'if I could only look up and look across the room, Rosaleen——'"

"Who was Rosaleen?"

"Me," briefly. "'As I sit mourning o' nights solitary at my window—if I could only look up and see yourself in the doorway, grave as Mary among the lilies—in your simple white shift, Rosaleen. . . .'"

"What's a shift?" Winnie was galvanized anew by curiosity.

"An animal only to be found in Ireland. The skin of the shift is used for coats. . . ."

"But why did he want you to come to his room in a white fur coat?" completely mystified.

"Men do," Deb explained lightly. "There was Monna Vanna, you know. . . ."

"And you *went*? Well, you *are*! What did *he* do?" her appetite was growing by what Deb gave it to feed upon.

Scornful of her expectation, and without removing her eyes from that visionary road specked by the little black figures of men, Deb answered her: "He smiled mournfully, without moving from where he sat solitary at his window, and murmured: 'This does not make a man feel good, Rosaleen——'

Perhaps those words were, for me, the dawn of love. Perhaps—who knows. . . ."

"But what happened?" goggled Winnie.

"The landlord came in with the watering-pot," Deb snubbed her, brutally. "And we all played French rounders together."

"Memoirs of a Courtesan, by Lewis Carroll. Deb, I don't think Winnie can stand many more dawns."

"Olaf was romantic. Olaf was fair and blue-eyed and white of skin, and just twenty; and he came from the northern forests of Sweden. Nothing was too stock sentimental for him. . . . When I set out to gather roses in a basket from my garden before breakfast, he followed me about saying how beautiful it was to see me gather roses in a basket from my garden before breakfast. . . . He dreamt of a day when he should be standing in the doorway of his hut among the snow, carelessly rubbing up his ski and shielding his eyes from the Aurora Borealis, and I, a weary little dark-haired princess dressed all in white——"

"That shift might come in useful again."

"—Would come plodding towards him through the storm like—like a weary little dark-haired princess. Then I told him what I really looked like in really cold weather. . . . And so his dawn of love was shattered in the bud——"

Antonia groaned at the metaphor. And Deb, who was getting tired, even of the expression in Winifred's eyes, grew ever briefer and more inconsequent in her memoirs.

"Tremayne said quickly: 'You can trust me, Deb—You needn't be afraid. . . .' And then looked like a sulky steam-roller when I cried back, 'I'm *not* afraid . . . I'm hurt!'—And I told him he ought to take a few lessons in comparative anatomy—and then he sulked again. What is comparative anatomy, Jill? Would it mean comparing one girl with another, in his case? Anyhow he's not as deft as that dear old coachman who was sixty-four and wanted me to come out with him to Canada and make a fresh start with him there. But he'd always driven the Brighton coaches, so I was sure he'd

feel the change and I wouldn't be able to make up to him for it. . . . He was just a year younger than Grandfather Mackenzie, whom I'd always snuggled up to and curled my little hand confidingly in his big shaggy paw. That was before I learnt that sixty-four was no age at all, though his wife had looked at me queerly once or twice . . . and when I met Etienne Dalison at their garden-party, and grandfather said: 'Is he your fairy prince?' I laughed saucily up at his whiskers: 'Why not?' '*Because I want you all to myself,*' and jumped at me—Lord! how I ran!

"Etienne Dalison was the velvet hand inside the iron glove—and he never forgot it. 'Certainly you may go,' with a sort of deadly quiet. That was in his house at midnight—or it might have been a quarter to eleven. 'Is it likely I would detain you?' And courteously and quietly he helped me on with my cloak the instant I requested it. That was his quiet courtesy. . . .

"And he opened the door for me, and quietly stood aside to let me pass, saying quietly: '*You will telephone when you are ready.*' He knew I would.

"And I didn't.

"*He* did, though. He rang up twice, just to make sure that I understood his silence was a tense controlled silence, the silence of quiet strength . . . it would have been too terrible for words if I had thought it just ordinary silence!

"But he had an awfully voluptuous house; æsthetic and luxurious and barbaric—you know the style—all mosaics and art treasures and rose-leaves floating in the blood-red finger-bowls, and silken hangings and richly crocheted antimacassars, and Moorish fretwork and poker-work . . . oh, I forget what else. An invisible flutist or a lutist during meals to whip up your senses like cream . . . and an inner apartment with Louis the sixteenth's own bed standing encanopied in gold on an ivory platform, and an expensive little negligée thrown lightly for your use across the towel-horse, in case love dawns——"

Gillian sprang up abruptly from her chair, kicked away the surrounding billows of underwear, and walked firmly across to the couch; stood looking down with an unusual air of sternness:

"Deborah, I don't know if Winifred is shocked or not. The point is, *I am.* Your revelations have ceased to be funny

—they're merely pitiful. I take it, by the way, that they're mostly true ? "

" I'm not a novelist," responded Deb, shifting rather uneasily under Gillian Sherwood's censure. " What's up, Jill ? Do you imagine I've sinned with all these heroes in turn ? "

" No, I don't. That's just it. All this dabbling—it isn't worth while. You know much too much—you know everything. You've got a rotten name—as bad as mine. And nothing to show for it. You're smothered with dust from the arena—but you never ride. Deb, Deb, a little honest sin, for Heaven's sake ! I'm not keen on this demi-game ! "

" A little honest sin—or a little honest chastity——" Antonia took up her stand by Gillian's side, and put one arm about her shoulders. . . .

" Two of you ! " Deb raised herself on one elbow and prepared for battle ; " les extrèmes se touchent ! "

" What does that mean ? " laboriously from Winifred.

" Look next time there's a fried whiting on your plate. Yes—two of us, Deb—we've been meaning to pitch into you since some time, Antonia and I. What are you doing with Blair Stevenson ? "

" What's Blair Stevenson doing with you ? " Antonia amended.

Their victim protested. " I could tell you better if you wouldn't both hover over me in that menacing way. Do, please, go back to your seats. Pair of bullies ! "

They humoured her in that, but Deb saw there was no escape from their quiet persistence of enquiry.

" Did I tell you about a man in the train——" she began.

" We were asking you about Blair Stevenson, Deb."

" Yes, but the man in the train bears on the question—he does, honestly. And I'm sure Winnie would like to hear about him—it raises an interesting point of etiquette, . . . Well, once upon a time," in a great hurry, for she saw that Antonia and Gillian would immediately blockade any gap she exposed to them—" I was travelling, and there were lots of people in the carriage, and one quite nice-looking man, and presently all the other people got out, and we both had a sort of feeling of release . . . at least, I had, and I knew he had too. He asked if I minded whether he smoked, and I said I didn't a bit, so he offered me a cigarette, and I took it and thanked him nicely. Well, it would have been so ridiculous to have glared at him

and been porcupiny all over, and to have sat there consciously and conspicuously hugging my virtue as though I suspected from the very first moment that he had designs upon it. I made some remark about having to hurry with the cigarette as I got out at the next station—' Oh, then we haven't got very much time, have we ? ' "

Deb broke off. Her hands were hotly clenched, and her eyes a sombre, crepuscular blue. . . .

" Jill—I fought for it like a—a—devil-cat, for what I had—God knows why—but I *had* guarded it by flight and by cunning and by instinct, for years and years—since the very beginning. . . . And now this perfectly casual stranger takes it for granted it was his for the asking. I was up against it—and I fought—so that he was astonished—let me go. I walked to the other end of the carriage and sat there, looking out. Presently he said in a different way altogether—not ashamed of himself and perfectly cool, but *different:* ' You can come back to your seat opposite me. It's all right.' It was all right, and I came back and said slowly : ' Not exactly playing the game, was it ? ' You see, he was sure to have been a public-school boy, and if he had winced, I'd have gone on to say something about how would he like it if his sister. . . ."

" Deb—is nothing sacred to you ? "

" That's what *I* was going to ask *him.* But he proved a fairly unusual type. He speculated a moment, and then shook his head, smiling : ' Yes—but you shouldn't have taken the cigarette. That's an accepted cue, you know—or if you didn't know, you ought to have.' It struck me for the very first time that there is something in it when our mothers and aunts warn us not to let unknown young men talk to us."

" Yes, but they ought to tell us why and they never do," in one long breath from Nell, whom the other girls had forgotten was present.

" Our aunts and mothers, most of them, have Weldon's-Paper-Pattern still in their systems, however tolerant and lax they may appear on the surface."

" Then no wonder we get into messes, scrabbling about for wisdom. Our aunts and mothers weren't allowed to scrabble by their aunts and mothers. . . . And our children won't need to scrabble."

" Our children," murmured Jill, and her hand touched Nell's hair regretfully. . . . Nell was such a baby still !

"We're at the transition period—do you remember that sketch I did of you, Deb? And the transition period has to pay, always."

"Then is there a male of the transition period—to match the girl? or are we transitting alone?"

"Same old male—the one I met in the train. And experiment clashed with habit. That's what I've been trying to tell about."

Winnie roused herself to make contribution to the chorus: "It was awful of you to have gone on letting him talk to you after he had insulted you."

"Why? I was curious what he had done it for. It can't have been passion, romance—not even the dawn of love, Winnie—for any stray girl in a railway carriage. I had just wanted to be friendly. And I was frightened out of being friendly, by . . . well, the male habit. *I'd* had no desire to spring upon him the moment we were alone. I told him so."

"You didn't! Deb, you *are*! What did he say?"

"Grinned and said: 'You're an odd kid. Here's your station, isn't it? Good-bye and good luck.' He helped me out, and I asked if I might finish the cigarette or if under the circumstances it was etiquette to throw it away? . . . Oh, the incident was nothing; the whole moral of it is, that it wouldn't have happened to Antonia, so it's no good lecturing me according to the Antonian standard. Or the Gillian standard either—great loves don't come to such as me."

"Because you experiment in small loves," Gillian lit a cigarette and planted both feet on the mantelpiece, "small loves and small loaves and half loaves——"

"Better than no bread."

"Wrong again. You must have learnt by now that it's either Heaven . . . or always the same."

"Men always the same?—indeed they're not!" Zoe had returned mentally refreshed from pantry society. "*If* they were always the same, we needn't bother so to keep on changing them, need we? It's the different ways of approach that are so perfectly fascinating; and the different idea each one has of the same identical you; and how long each is going to take, and what sort of places they choose, and their pasts, and their way of holding you—I do like to be nicely held, don't you, Antonia?—Oh no, I forgot, you don't! There are dozens and thousands of differences, and each has to be managed

differently ; and what encourages one kind, puts another right off . . . even what they prefer to eat, and if they like their kisses hard or soft—I say, doesn't that sound like eggs ? Oh, I do think, I really do, that variety is most of the fun ; and seeing how they get to the point. They bore me when they're within shouting distance. . . . Besides, I get so specially interested in what each new man is going to give me. You would soon get to know that, if you always kept to the same. Pinto, for instance . . . he gives me olives, and I hate them. You don't think me greedy, do you ? I'd hate to be greedy, but I *do* like presents ! "

" I believe you're the demi-maid by temperament," Gillian said, smiling at her, while she reflected that as fast as that greedy right hand of Zoe plundered, the generous left hand of Zoe gave. " Deb isn't. And that's why Deb has to be spoken to seriously by her pals. We're waiting to hear about Blair."

" What about Blair ? " Deb seemed inclined to sulk. " Throw me a cig, Winnie. And a match. *And* the box to strike it on—thanks. What about Blair ? He's the demi-man, if you like, as far as I'm concerned. I was wrong when I said the male of the transition period didn't exist. The Male who Pursues has ceased to exist. Nowadays he implies, more or less delicately, that he has no wish to make you his wife and you needn't think it ; but being your own mistress—well, will you ? And you imply equally delicately : ' Yes, but not yours, so *you* needn't think it ! ' Then you both know where you are. The rest is on debatable ground."

Zoe cried, appalled at Deb's elasticity of speech, " Well, I must say, Deb, I think you're horrid. I do, really. I'm not a prig, but I don't think you're a bit nice. I suppose I'm old-fashioned. And I'm not at all surprised at Winnie. . . ." who, with a crimson face at the word " mistress," had marched out of the room.

" *That* doesn't matter," Gillian defended Deb, with that odd incongruous air of casual authority which was unconsciously based on her years of vital work and clear thinking and swift unerring sense of values ; on a courageous judgment that hummed through the air like an arrow, and stuck quivering in the gold ; on the deference she received from her equals, men with good brains and of good quality ; men of genius, even, who had deferred to her in her own line. " Winnie does quite

a good deal of what one might call 'spooning' . . . 'adventuring on debatable ground' . . . 'half-a-loafing' . . . whatever you like. But it's just that she can't bear—the labels. While one is vague about the name of a thing, it's all right, according to Winnie. She's not a conscious humbug; belongs to a type. And she enjoys the half-loaf—like Zoe. Well, call it her quarter-loaf. The point is—do you enjoy yours, Deb? I don't believe you do. And if you don't, it's not worth it. In the case of Blair Stevenson, for instance?"

Deb made a desperate attempt to shed all her psycho-entanglements, and be honest—because it was Jill who asked. And this, even though she had long ago discovered that the self one pretends to is much more convincing to the hearer, than the self nearer to reality. A detached attitude helps expression.

"It pleases him and it doesn't hurt me," she summed up slowly.

"And what's the object of pleasing him?" Antonia enquired, in scorn of the masculine claim.

"That it doesn't hurt me."

"It *has* hurt you. It has hurt all of us—through you." Her lower lip quivered; proudly she fastened it to composure with her teeth.

"Well?" Deb flung at Gillian; and thoughtfully came the answer:

"I'm not sitting in judgment, Deb. Who am I, etc. But it seems to me the natural thing to draw such pleasure from the touch of a man, that contact becomes beautiful and therefore true. Or else to be so repelled by it . . . that you sit up and behave. But what possible reason you can have to lie there and merely suffer it without joy or fulfilment——"

"It does become annoying at times to think he's having so much more fun than I," flippantly. She pushed her hands impatiently through the hot thick masses of her hair. "Oh, I'm tired of being a girl, anyway. I'll cut my hair short for a start, and be a boy. Have you got some big scissors, Jill?"

"Nail-scissors, curved; in the shape of a stork."

"Don't be an idiot, Deb—your glorious mane. . . ."

"Oh, Deb——"

But in spite of the protests of Antonia, Nell and Zoe—Gillian sat silent, probably thinking any distraction good for Deb's soul at the moment—she unpinned her hair and let it fall in

a dense blue-black web over her face; her voice came in muffled jerks from the improvised tent:

"It's that once started . . . it seems so silly to stop. So silly and affected. Anyway, they won't believe you—once you've let them start. And I want to be appreciated just a little . . . I'm twenty-five; and—and—how—how are you to know it's going to be the real thing at last, unless you let them begin? . . . Or even a bit of the real thing? Or even one single thrill. . . . I don't know what's the matter with me that I never thrill. I—I'd go back to be chaste and white if I could. But I've had too much tolerance, and my moral sense has got slack and messy. And men know—the sort of thing you allow. It gets about: Blair knew. . . . One might as well live up to it." All this confession, while the scissors had been snip-snipping; an occasional soft swish of hair falling to the carpet—disconcerting sound, that made young Nell suddenly wince and cover her ears.

"But you can go on—if you can't go back."

"This from you, O vestal!" Deb shook back her ragged curtain, and scissors suspended, gazed in sheer surprise at Antonia. "Or was it Jill speaking in Antonia's voice?"

"The whole way—or no way. The last, for me. But you've proved that it's impossible for you, now. So the whole way. I despise—debatable ground."

"It's too late for the whole way, too. Yes, I'm quite logical. You either rush headlong from chastity into wantonness—forgive me, Jill, it's the wrong word, but I can't think of another—or else into matrimony. Debatable ground is for those who hesitate. And hesitation makes the demi-maid!" She gripped a long strand of hair, held it out and slashed at it savagely.

"And it's queer," she went on, "but I've still got the inborn conviction that wantonness gets the worst of it. I seem to see a little woodcut, like the illustration of a very familiar old book, of a man forsaking the girl he has betrayed, to die or drag on in squalor and shame and bitterness, while he returns to his wife, the sheltered woman, the law-sanctified mother of his children. I may be all wrong—but that's how it comes to me."

"It comes to me in exactly opposite form," Gillian laughed. "Not from personal motives, but from the same sense as Deb, of a familiar picture. . . . The wife forsaken, worn and weep-

ing, face downwards on a sofa, while the man hurries away to the woman who is free, insolent and triumphant. The wanton scores—and that's why I've always avoided being the wife."

"The wife scores—and that's why I've always dreaded being the wanton."

Gillian laughed again. "I don't mind if you call me a wanton, as long as you don't call me a pioneer. And——"

"Oh, Jill," cried Zoe in clamorous distress, "I thought you'd prefer it, I did really; or I should never have—but whenever I found people talking about you, I always excused you by saying you were a Pioneer of the New Era of Womanhood. . . ."

"God! . . ." murmured the victim thus mislabelled.

"But aren't you? I mean, don't you believe that this is the beginning of a sort of New Era when we shall be as free as men?"

"I don't!" Antonia cut in clearly. "I hope it's rather the beginning of a New Era (as you call it) when men shall be as self-controlled as us. Why on earth should development always seem to be along the lines of licence? Girls nowadays will run wild all over the place for a bit, just to prove they've got their money and their independence and the vote and a special prerogative and a latitude and a longitude . . . all that. And then they'll get a sense of responsibility and cool down and settle down, and ask for limitations—and with that, a new phase, and perhaps a finer one, will begin. Your Era is nine times out of ten only a phase. I hold by the law—the old social law of monogamy. It has made itself out of the instinctive need of it, and it recurs again and again down the whole cycle of civilization—out of the instinctive need for it. There have been maidens, wives and harlots through all the ages—surely there's no genuine need to muddle them all up? no need for free love, except for the exceptions from the herd?—and the exceptions can always be trusted to look out for themselves."

"But it isn't monogamy that Gillian & Co. are opposing," Zoe contested—with the air of a wise little Bubbles, sitting on a footstool, with her primrose curls haloed in lamplight—"it's marriage."

"Marriage is quite a good institution, for those who want it. You arid Intellectuals never see that where two people

need a symbolic or a religious or even a civic recognition that they belong together, they should be allowed to have it."

"But the millions of cases where it has turned out badly——"

"Would have turned out just as badly if the couple had been living together in free love."

"But, Antonia, then they could just have walked away from each other!"

"It's very rare that it's a simultaneous walk-away. The one walks . . . and the other suffers. And this wrench would occur in any case. The legal wrench is a bit of a bother—and I grant you that the divorce laws might be reformed—but the human wrench is inevitable, in spite of all progress and propagandists and pioneers!"

Antonia was in battle mood, and Gillian gave her battle. They confronted each other not unlike a pair of splendid boys, the one erect with her back to the peacock window-curtains, hands clasped behind her, her head, a red-brown oval, slewed defiantly upwards; while the other rested her arms and chin along the back of a precariously tilted chair, which she vehemently bumped forward again to safety at the alliterative peroration of Antonia's speech.

"Propagandists and pioneers—*no*! By heaven, you're unjust!—do you suppose we're out to be as intolerant of the Merely Married, as they have hitherto been of us? Look here—I loathe theoretical talk—I just claim a right to do what my own circumstances dictate, without being preached at and interfered with. There's no such thing as Gillian & Co.—if I and my like are accidentally in the van of progress, we advance separately, each to her own peril. And if we're only freaks and exceptions, lawbreakers and wantons—then again, each to her own peril. But what I do resent, savagely, is that Theo and I can't have a child, without raising a stinging pestering swarm of minor considerations—servants, landladies, schoolmistresses, tradesmen—once there's a family there's got to be a permanent home, and that translates into all this sordid beastliness of prying and inspection, gossiping and blackmail, deceiving and finding-out, and the intolerant officialdom you're so keen on, Antonia. And I daresay the kid would have to pay too, somehow, sometime. Well—we're not going to give all this a chance. But I maintain that the arid Intellectuals are finer, truer stuff than the Herd, because they don't bother the Herd, and the Herd will never stop bothering us.

Never. They're bothering now because Theo has a wife living. It doesn't matter to them that I'm doing far better work and he's a far better man, because we live together. The mind of the Herd can't stretch to individual demand. It can't be tender or intuitive—it just fusses. So—yes—call me a pioneer if you like; not of any glucose Movement to link people together for a common cause and so forth—there's too much of that—but for the right to unlink oneself and to unlink one's thoughts from other people's thoughts—the right of detachment."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Zoe. "Isn't it funny, how people who used to just talk, ever since the war have talked as though they were making speeches?"

Antonia and Gillian looked guiltily at one another. "I'm afraid she's right," Antonia sighed. "Sorry, Zoe. As a matter of fact, it's perfectly ridiculous to be discussing the sex problem at all, since the war. Ancient cobwebs which the great broom has still left clinging. . . ."

Again Gillian leapt to the assault. "The 'sex problem,' as you call it—a horrid phrase which suggests pamphlets and tracts—has survived a million wars and even caused one or two. So there's no earthly reason why we shouldn't be discussing it. Here we sit in proof of my statement—five girls who are all employed on war work (good thing Winnie's out of the room for this reckoning), who still find some difficulty in sexually disposing of themselves—I mean, in the abstract. If Deb and Nell weren't at the canteen, and Antonia a chauffeuse, and Zoe an affliction to the War Office, and I in my laboratory spying out new diseases that resent bitterly not being allowed to keep themselves to themselves; if we were just mooching and flirting and grumbling, and prodding our emotions, people might be justified in saying we were all in an unhealthy frame of mind from lack of topical co-operation. But as it is, the war goes on, and sex goes on, quite self-reliantly. You can't cancel one against the other. It's false mathematics."

"My dear Jill, you can't state in that arbitrary fashion that war isn't going to affect the sex problem—it's all right, Zoe, I'm not going to speak for long; take up the 'Tatler' in the meanwhile!—It will affect it in every possible way: lack of men; abnormal conditions; economic liberty for girls hitherto dependent——"

"I'm wrong. Oh, I'm totally wrong! . . . Deb, come

out of what's left of your hair and save me! I don't *want* to hear about economic conditions. The off-side is yards shorter than the other."

"Wait one minute," murmured Deb, industriously and wholly absorbed in her labours.

Antonia continued, in serene mockery of Gillian: "And I, for one, am not in the least difficulty, thanks, over how to dispose of myself sexually in the abstract. And I shouldn't imagine from external evidence that you were either, Jill. Zoe, are you at all puzzled how to dispose of yourself sexually in the abstract? Henceforth and hereafter there's always Pinto, isn't there, when the supply of other friendly aliens is exhausted?"

"You may laugh," cried that young person in eager defence of her continental tastes—"but it doesn't seem natural to me to be made love to in English—it doesn't really! I always have to turn it into French or Italian or Portuguese in my head, before it becomes decent somehow. Isn't it funny? but it's quite true. I suppose it's a habit."

"Nell is a minor and an adolescent, and, like Jill's more obscure diseases, prefers to keep herself to herself," Antonia went on, "so there's no need to include her in our enquiry. Winifred lives mainly in a state of mental sloth, and is not, I think, wrestling very furiously with the sexual problem."

"As long as she's only kissed at the extremities," Zoe threw in.

"Manon is, we hear, formally and decorously engaged to be married. So there really remains only Deb, of the whole group, who might be said to be in difficulties over the disposal of herself sexually in the abstract. And Deb is a goose."

"And Deb is a goose!" echoed Zoe and Gillian in affirmative chorus.

Deb gave a final snip, flung the scissors down, and faced the company. "How do you like me?"

"Well," remarked Gillian, after they had all stared in solemn criticism for several minutes, "I hardly think the shears have disposed of the problem. . . ."

It was, indeed, a quaint enough perversity that Deb's present flying mop of short black hair caused her to look even more girlish than hitherto; perhaps it was the pure beautiful curve of her throat, now visible from every angle. Her little round head was the head of a child-saint; her slim body, lightly-

poised and undeveloped, was pathetic anomaly to eyes and mouth which revealed a mind that had heard of all sin, and was blunt to all sin, and weary of all sin . . . victim of the transition period.

"Don't you like it?" disappointed at the silence of her comrades, broken only by Gillian's one caustic comment. "I shall have to get it properly trimmed and trained at a hairdresser's, of course. But I think it suits me, rather. . . ."

"What are you going to do with your shorn femininity?" Gillian pointed to the showers of long hair lying about the carpet. "You can't leave it here, you know—Theo's so awfully impressionable."

"My shorn femininity," said Deb, gathering it up in her arms, "shall go into a brown paper parcel and be sold for the benefit of the Red Cross—'And nothing in life became it like its death!'"

IV

For a space of time parallel to this discussion, four men were sitting in Blair Stevenson's library, drinking whisky and soda, and lazily depreciating the first-night play they had just witnessed, and of which Theo Pandos had to supply a dramatic criticism for "The Dawn." He was dashing down his copy now, and occasionally pleading with Cliffe Kennedy to hold back his comic reminiscences about the Censorship, for just a few minutes longer.

"Why they don't sack you——!"

"I'm a highly useful servant of the State," Cliffe rejoined. 'And I've never before had as big a private mail as I liked. I used to read my own letters and my mother's, and my little sister Beth's; and the letters of any stray guest who happened to be in the house, and the servants' letters—and even then I wasn't satisfied. Now I can glut myself opening letters." He told a few more incredible and very delightful tales of these same letters. And then Pandos flung down the fountain-pen, to intimate he had finished a column of the "death-by-a-thousand-slices," for which he had made a name, took up his glass of whisky and soda; and the conversation, as was usual directly he touched it, pivoted round to the subject of women. . . .

"I don't understand girls nowadays," confessed the fourth

of the quartette, who was little Timothy Fawcett of the Royal Flying Corps. Having been a whole year on continuous active service in France, he was now stationed at Hendon for a few months respite of light home duty.

Timothy was rather a nice boy. He was fair and shy and solemn, with those soft cherub curves to his mouth that remind one of dewy sleep and of a mother fondly shading the candle from the eyes of her baby son in his cradle. And his innocent appearance did not call for the conventional corollary that it masked the biggest dare-devil in the squadron. His appearance coincided exactly with his disposition. Timothy was undoubtedly both shy and solemn, with wits that moved but slowly, and nerves and courage as steady as his steady questioning blue eyes.

"I don't understand women nowadays," he began. And Blair, with whom he was rather a favourite, said encouragingly:

"Go on, Sonny!"

Timothy loosened his Sam Browne, and stared at his puttees; then, by an inspiration, emptied his glass; and thus fortified, was able to continue:

"What I mean is—there used to be the girls you met in your own set, and they went about with your sisters, and there was no harm if you kissed 'em on the river, but of course you took jolly good care what you talked about to 'em. Sometimes you married 'em."

"Exactly," Kennedy commented. "Sometimes you married 'em. Proceed, Timothy."

"And then—there was the other kind." Timothy came to a full stop.

And the little Greek, his eyes vivid with mischief, took up the sequel of events:

"And these you kissed also . . . and not only on the river. And you told them those droll stories that could not be told to the girls you married sometimes. And they laughed with flattering appreciation."

"What I mean," Timothy began anew, with obstinate determination to finish up the subject in as few words as possible, "is that a fellow used to be able to tell the two sorts apart in half a jiff, and now they've gone and got themselves so muddled up . . . you take out one of the first kind, thoroughly nice girl and all that—and she talks about—well—dash it—about—about——"

" —The second kind," suggested Stevenson.

" And she wants you to take her to a night-club, and laughs at you for bein' shocked, an' argues about it—no end knowing ! And so one takes the cue and follows up—and then half times out of ten she turns on the freezin' tap, and quite right too, only she ought to have done it from the beginning. And they've got quite pally, too, with—well—the other sort. It's so rum. You meet 'em with their arms round each other's waists. . . . It's all a mix-up an' you never know where you are or what you're safe to say, or who knows who or how much you're let in for——"

" Tim likes to know where a good woman ends and a bad one begins—that's the trouble in brief, isn't it ? "

" Yes," Timothy answered his host. And drew a long breath . . . waiting for enlightenment.

" Keep 'em divided in your own mind, Tim, and it will be all right. The shuffle is mostly intellectual, and needn't concern you. Your nice girl, because she knows rather more than she used to, believes she can compete with professionals. *Mais ce n'est pas son métier*—and she'll discover that in time. Meanwhile, we know where to find our wives and where to find our mistresses ; and those who wish to be met on half-way ground, let us meet them on half-way ground. It's not for us to be pushing them back into innocence or toppling them forward into guilt." Stevenson lay back with arms crossed behind his head, in his wonted state of unruffled good-humour.

Kennedy, greatly excited, contested this bland point of view : " I *object* to half-way ground. Strongly. Besides, it's a form of blacklegging. Give me sharp divisions—sand and rock. Confound it, I don't want my wife, when I get her, to be able to chatter like a frank comrade about all the ins and outs of my squalid existence before I met her. I hate frank comrades. They're too — too reasonable altogether. I hate an intellectual mate, and a pure white friend of my little sister Beth, and almost a harlot, all combined, like one of those beastly mechanical book-cases and step-ladder and kitchen-table patent arrangements . . . and pull out whichever you want. Conveniences bore me. Subtleties bore me still more. And you can never tell, with these new-fangled girls, just how many degrees they're still good and how many they're prepared to be bad. Oh, Lord ! Lord !—give me another one, stiff, Pandos."

" And yet," remarked Theo Pandos, complying, " I gathered that you were on very excellent terms with our special little group of—what do you call them ?—new-fangled girls ? "

Cliffe's features puckered to a gnome-like grin : " Ask 'em. I'm dear old Cliffe—just dear old Cliffe—quite sexless y'know—never been known to love—in—er—*that* way. It's funny, but I don't believe he *could*. . . ."

Blair Stevenson shrugged his shoulders composedly. " I'm of a grateful nature. What God sends me, I take. And what He refuses me, I refuse to desire. Some people are always returning a gift with requests for alteration."

Timothy sat listening ; his eyes rested seriously on first one speaker and then the other. " Yes," he said at last ; " But what's it all about ? I mean—what are they up to, those girls ? "

CHAPTER IV

I

"CAPTAIN ROTHENBURG—killed in action. Rothenburg—Rothenburg—that's a German name. What was he doing in an English command, I'd like to know? Ought to have been interned."

Richard sprang up, knuckles white with the clench of his hands on the rim of the breakfast-table, his brows a lowering black ridge of anger. He and Mr Gryce confronted one another across a space of half the dining-room. The other visitors sprinkled at the various tables looked up expectant, conscious of latent antagonism spurting at last into visibility. The old man's eyes bulged like pale marbles over the top of his newspaper. . . . "Ought to have been interned," he repeated ostentatiously to his neighbours.

"Sit down, Richard," his father commanded quietly. And as though with a physical effort, the wrestling look was unlocked; the boy sat down, head turned away from the detestable civilian who had dared sneer away Con's glory. As if Con wasn't as thumpingly keen a soldier as any of the purest British descent! Con, the splendid sixth-form hero of Richard's earliest Winborough days. And now . . . to make out he had given his life to no effect because his name happened to be German. . . .

Richard was still shaking from the harsh shock of the news, and from a sort of desperate hatred which almost approached fear. "Is it true?" he asked Ferdie, who was searching through "The Telegraph."

"I'm afraid so. Ah, yes, here: On May 15th . . . etc. I suppose his parents can only just have heard. Nearly a week, isn't it? Poor Con, he was a nice fellow. Otto will be upset—his eldest boy."

"But why do they print the name Rothenburg?" Stella questioned in a low voice, inaudible to Mr Gryce.

"I expect the young man had the good sense not to be

ashamed of his father's birthplace," rumbled Hermann Marcus, in an aggressive voice distinctly audible to Mr Gryce, who muttered : " Damned old Hun ! " amid a murmur of surrounding sympathy.

Richard explained : " David told me Con held out when the rest of them changed their name ; he was a Territorial ages before the war, and his men knew him as Rothenburg—good enough for them ! " with a defiant scowl in the direction of Mr Gryce. The latter, sending out his plate for more bacon : " I've had nothing but fat and gristle ! " remarked further to the young lady at the table beside him : " They're not half strict enough over this alien business. I like a German to *be* a German ; if they want to fight, can't they stick to their own side ? "

" Though I'm not surprised some of them are ashamed to," he creaked on, pulling his tuft of beard irascibly.

" No more, thanks." Richard escaped from the room. He very rarely finished a meal nowadays. . . . Aunt Stella followed him out, and waylaid him in the empty hall :

" Richard, you must take care what you say in the dining-room. You shouldn't have jumped up like that. Everybody saw."

" And Con died so that—so that he could have his second helping of bacon," Richard exploded.

" Yes, but you know in our position we've got to be careful. You especially."

" It's so unfair. So beastly unfair. If I thought he only said it to get my back up—but he believes it. He oughtn't to be *let* believe it. I want to hammer it into him that old Con wasn't even conscripted—was ready at the very first shove-off. Oh, it's mean to do him out of the credit. Not that he would have cared, but——"

Stella was surprised. Her nephew's extreme taciturnity was one of her stock subjects for jest.

" You'll have to go and condole with the Rothenburgs to-day."

Richard immediately lapsed into surly schoolboyhood : " Lord ! Must I ? "

" David is your friend. And as he happens to be at home—— Your father and I will be going after lunch. Or you can call by yourself this morning if you prefer it."

" Call ! " he grumbled. " As if David wanted people mooching about and saying they were sorry."

" Saying ? Aren't you sorry ? "

. . . Funny, how aunts were apt to say silly platitudes in a silly, ready-made voice, just when one was paying them the compliment of treating them like humans. It showed how careful you ought to be, Richard reflected glumly, on his way to Hampstead.

How on earth did one " condole ? " He knew right enough just how David had cared about Con, and what a swollen sensation attacked his own throat to think of anyone so cheery and keen on his job and altogether decent as his late school-captain, part of a heap of flung-together mixed-up limbs and mud and stained khaki, here and there twitching still. . . .

But all this was well set apart from official condolence. All this led to silence, not to speech. Richard, deliberately taking the longest way round to Fairwarne Gardens, became ever more acutely uncomfortable over his mission. Besides——

" You ought to have had it out with Mr Gryce."

The phrase spoke itself so clearly in his mind, and with such detached emphasis, that he started, and almost glanced over his shoulder for the speaker.

It was quite true ; his father had made a mistake in hushing him : himself had made a mistake in surrender. Mr Gryce had had the best of the encounter ; and probably never again would Richard be whipped to such a stinging fury of indignation. An ingredient of fear might well creep in . . . fear such as had twanged deep down in his consciousness when Aunt Stella said : " You especially. . . ." The owner of those light-blue bulging eyes would not hesitate to use the advantage of an adversary's birthplace.

Richard perceived uneasily how fatal it would be to live enslaved by the notion that he had lost all right to resent. Undoubtedly he ought to have had it out with old Gryce there and then at the breakfast table. Too late now. . . .

And here was the Redbury's house with blinds all lowered. He rang the bell ; and waiting on the doorstep, tried to break up his face every time it stiffened into a set shape appropriate to the business in hand.

" Is Mr David in ? "

David, in second-lieutenant's khaki sobered by a black mourning band on the sleeve, hardly looked up from his puttees at Richard's entrance ; and when the first apathetic " Hullo ! " was over, there seemed nothing more to be said. The room was

in semi-darkness, and the very slant of sunshine through the chinks was furtive.

"What on earth have you come for?" David burst out at last irritably. "To express your sincere sympathy with me in my great bereavement? Then for the Lord's sake, express it—if you can—and get it over, and be natural. You make me nervous, standing about as though you had changed into a black tie before coming out, which I wonder you haven't!"

Richard in his turn got thoroughly bad-tempered. The walk had been hot and dusty, and there was the episode of Mr Gryce that morning, and—and Con was dead. And now David merely jeered at him.

"All right—I'm going; you needn't worry. I didn't come here for fun, they made me."

David laughed uproariously. "That's better; that's more the little Richard we know and love!"

Richard grunted, and banged himself into a chair. He understood now. . . . David's noisy laughter had shown him.

"When did you get your commission?"

"Only last week. Samson worked it for me—through his cousin, Sir Ephraim Phillips. Did you know Samson was back from the Front?—trench-feet. Pater's still trying to rope him into the family, with Nell as a lasso; but I don't believe he's having any; still keen on Deb."

"So you'll be going to France, perhaps. . . ."

"Yes, in about six months I shall be able to avenge Con by killing the Hun who killed him."

"Does—would that—help?" Richard asked awkwardly. Then met David's ironic eyes—

"It ought to be the attitude, oughtn't it? Beatrice supplied me with it, and the family have taken up the chorus. It's so natural and picturesque and primitive: the younger brother belting on his sword and going forth to slay for the sake of the slain. Old Grandmother Phillips, who approves of me because she thinks I take my religion seriously, even added the Old Testament touch: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. . . .

No, Richard, it doesn't help at all. If I could land home on the one actual and definite German who was responsible for Con, it would be different. I believe in fighting—for love of a cause. As Con did. Oh, Con never said much, but he was a patriot down to bedrock fundamental; he was a pre-war

patriot, which was pretty rare. And now that he's dead, I can't possibly stand out. Because of my people. It would explode all that he's done for them. 'My son who was killed in action' would be see-sawed out of all usefulness by 'My son who conscientiously objected.' They wouldn't be able to say the words 'My son' at all. I can't play them or Con a shabby trick like that; after all, patriotism begins at home —loyalty to one's family is a local form of patriotism, I suppose. If the Redburys were properly entrenched, but——"

"'In our position.' . . ." Richard quoted softly.

And David added with very unboyish bitterness: "Pater's awfully upset now—but I can already foresee what a magnificent asset Con's death is going to be—'in our position,' as you say. Pater will run it for all he's worth. Marcus, there's a kink wrong in civilization when a father's got to swank for safety on a son's death."

"Swank?"

"There are letters to show, from the Colonel, from brother-officers, from his men. It seems that long after he was wounded, he held that bit of trench with one machine-gun to cover a retreat. Oh, the stock tale of heroism!"

Richard was badly jarred by the last words. It struck him that David was carrying flippant detachment rather too far; one might well be glad of a brother who was guilty of the stock heroism. "Con jolly well deserves a medal for that," he remarked on an aggressive note.

And David said: "He's been recommended for the D.S.O." —and suddenly he jerked up his head and went crimson. . . . Richard turned his eyes away from that surge of hot red pride. Funny, how one never knew, with David!

Trudchen Redbury popped in her head, as though in search of someone.

"Ach, Davidchen——" she nodded kindly to the two boys, but still did not appear to have found what—or who—she wanted. Her comfortable fat little face was rough and scrapy with long crying—the kind of crying that goes on and on, and stops for a bit, and smiles and talks and gives the orders in the kitchen, and then meanders on again. . . .

Trudchen had none of the Spartan courage recommended to mothers nowadays.

"Hullo, Mums!"—David sprang up and laid his arm round her dumpy shoulders and gently put his lips to her cheek—

(Yes, he was a dear fellow, her youngest boy, and so much more considerate than Con, who had always nearly knocked her down with his violent hugs. . . . "Mein Konrad!")

"Na, Richard, how goes your Aunt Stella?"

"She's coming this afternoon." And Richard growled something in which the word "sorry" vaguely occurred.

"David, vot do you sink?—if I write to liebe Anna now, it vill gewiss reach her in the neighbourhood of the sixtieth birthday when there vill be rejoicings—what one can rejoice these days——" she shrugged resignedly. "Our Con more than you or Max your Aunt's loveling ever was. Vot do you sink, David?"—for the second time; "shall I vait before I write to Berlin—a month perhaps? One does not wish to spoil a birthday."

But beyond a queer look shot towards Richard, David made no comment. And presently Trudchen went on, with a sort of chirruppy perplexity:

"And you know how angry Papa is when I ask him at all about Anna and Karl, though he used to love and eat largely of her Pflaumentorte and vex me by naming it better than mine. And yet not even a letter from me for the sixtieth birthday—vot vill she think? And she and I wiz ever only a year between . . . but how can one write and say nothing about our Con . . . though it will surely remind her again of the armer seligen Fritz—since how little while is he too . . . my eldest and her youngest——" she sighed. "Perhaps—no—I will not tell zem—now." And yet again: "Vot do you sink, David?"

"There's Max," he reminded her. "We've written to Max—and if he sees Uncle Karl——"

"Ne, Schatz, not now they have moved him to that camp so far away. . . . And one does not know vot to believe or not; they say—Otto says the Chermans do such terrible sings to the English prisoners—and the Phillips tell me too—it is almost unthinkbar—to cut off *both* the hands at the wrist——"

"Mums, Mums, when you've had letters through in Max's own writing——"

"As if the dear boy would worry me by telling it in a letter . . ." sobbed Trudchen.

Richard emphatically felt the need of departure. And the Lord spared him an encounter with Otto in the hall.

He lunched, and then sauntered into the afternoon show at a music-hall, thinking to get rid of himself by plunging into

a mass of people and a rattle of sound. But the dress-circle was filled with an atmosphere unusually attentive to the performers on the stage; and when the lights were raised during the interval, he perceived that the seats were mainly occupied by a large detachment from St Dunstan's: men who had been blinded in the war; men who had been chosen haphazard for the greatest sacrifice of all. Richard wondered whether a single one of them had anticipated such a calamity as this; and whether, knowing, they would still have willingly exposed themselves; he had heard so many soldiers bound for the Front, half-jokingly prophecy their own death, or a broken nose, or a wooden leg; but—no, he had never heard the possibility of blindness joked about. Was this the secret fear they all carried in their hearts when they volunteered?

"Not a bad show," he remarked to his neighbour, who immediately turned on him one immense rolling eye and a tiny glass one, and became confidential. He was a comical little chap, small and square, with a wide mouth, a skyward nose, and a knowing air that was enhanced by the appearance of a fixed wink. He informed Richard that he was the third of a trio; that he was his mother's favourite, and his father's favourite and the favourite of his two brothers; that one of his brothers had married a shrew and the other a slattern, and he alone had the perfect wife; and that the less fortunate twain were wont to say to him: "Jock, wish I 'ad yer luck!" . . . Moreover, he was the secret favourite of both the slattern and the shrew, and he ought by rights to have won the waltzing competition up at St Dunstan's on Monday night, but his partner had fouled his chances by treading three times on his toe, and it was bluggy well the last time he was going to lug her round the room! . . .

"*You brick!*" muttered Richard in his heart, over and over again. Not only to be jolly and normal, but actually keen about things still—prizes, and your brother's wife! not, as one instinctively imagined these martyrs of the war, pensive and resigned and uncannily patient, with a sort of pale upliftedness. . . .

The jovial rowdiness in that portion of the auditorium was hushed as the curtain went up on a troupe of acrobats and dancers kissing amorous hands to the audience, from various inverted positions on the trapeze.

"Wot's that?" demanded Richard's neighbour. Then:

"'R— I see, said the blind man!' ackerbats—lot o' use to us blindies, that. Funny idea o' givin' us pleasure some people 'ave: one old geezer, she came ter take me out fer the day in a kerridge an' all. 'Wot-o!' sez I to myself. An'—are you listenin', you?"—with a nudge—"an' she took me *three times to Church* afore she brought me back in the evenin'!"

Richard ducked his head in a smother of laughter; the enormous eye rolled mournfully in his direction had been so pregnant of disgust.

"Three times to Church, an' no lollies. An' me 'elpless. Some people——" words failed him. He fumbled precariously with a cigarette and a lighted match, quite matter-of-fact over his handicap. "That all right?" shaking the match to and fro and dropping it still alight; Richard's foot shot out, stealthily. . . . "'Ave one? they give us plenty. Yus, when she come again, I was in 'iding, betcherlife. Scout warned me. 'That pore well-be'aved young man anywhere about?' sez she to Sister; but Sister was a sport and didn't let on. So she just took a look round at me pals: 'Are they all quite blind?' sez she; 'Yus, but they ain't deaf,' sez Sister, quick as 'ell. 'R well, s'pose 'er idea of 'appiness ain't mine; she did 'er best."

"What does make you happy?"

The reply was brief and to the point: "Taxis an' cuddlin'."

. . . It was not until the last turn of all, a Chinese conjuror, that Richard found his companion's attention sufficiently astray from the stage to permit him to put a question that had lately nagged for an answer from its source. "I say—what made you join up?"

"Looked as though 'Is Majesty wos invitin' specially me to a private picnic. An' I sez: *With* pleasure! . . . Yus, an' then I woke up, an' found one of my eyes gone West, an' t'other deaf-an'-dumb. Well, I'm not saying nuffing to that; wot's done is done, an' 'ad ter be done by someone, an' Government's paying me 'ansome for the rest o' my life; but when it comes to putting me to a *job*——" again a large disgusted eye appealed to Richard for sympathy. "Work? not 'alf! And the other chaps is that keen they makes an awkward president."

"What?"

"President. Same as setting an example, only not quite. But you just see what me mother thinks abaht it." He fumbled

in his pockets, pulled out two or three crumpled letters, and thrust them into Richard's hand. "Read 'em."

The main point of the letters was clear: Harold's old mother passionately advised Harold not to work—thank God there was plenty while she and father could live and work for him; plenty afterwards too—"I will see to that, son, so don't you bother to learn a trade. Well, son, never mind about your sight, that don't matter to us; at any rate your not one as had cold feet. There'll always be plenty for you, so don't you let them make you learn nothing you don't want, darling——"

"Thank you," said Richard gently, passing the letters back. Most of the last pages were filled up with pencil crosses; he wondered if Harold knew. . . .

The music was holding its breath while Li Hung Wang surpassed himself in a last effort of magic; resulting in a terrific display of flags; and the curtains swaying together, back again, and once more together to the opening chords of "Land of Hope and Glory."

Immediately the men of St Dunstan's shuffled to their feet and stood at attention while they sang through the first verse of Elgar's anthem, till the whole risen audience, enthusiastically joining in, swamped their voices in a volume of louder, fresher sound. . . .

And Richard carried out into the Strand the blurred vision of uneven rows of weedy, shambling figures in their ill-fitting mufti, the ephemeral vanity of khaki shed now for good, ordinary men in ordinary casual clothes, heads tilted stiffly backwards:

"Land of Hope and Glory
Mother of the Free—"

And he knew that though the picture of Trudchen Redbury perplexed over the question whether tidings of Con's death in the English trenches should be sent to spoil the birthday of her sister Anna in Berlin, might and did symbolize an international predicament—yet that other picture was indeed war and the splendour of war and beyond war; was patriotism itself, the urge and reason for patriotism, the ultimate answer to all niggling private issues; he knew that before war and after war, war may be averted; but during war ours is to shut both eyes and stand by the blind and follow the dead.

And then, in all the forgetful semi-hysterical jubilance of

the pride of belonging, he was brought to a standstill as though by a pounding blow on the forehead, confronted with a placard of a weekly journal just out :

" Enemy Aliens. Intern them all."

As surely a personal message for him, as a Salvationist's shouted text goes straight home to the heart of a sinner.

" What's the good ? they don't want me. . . ."

He seemed to be repeating vaguely some childish experience of disappointment, when his eagerly proffered help was turned away with the same superciliousness of uncomprehending rebuff.

" They don't want me. Well—I don't want them either ! " . . . he was not so very much older now, after all.

" I don't want to be English ! "

No, Richard ? Not even for the sake of those rows of eyes, bandaged and gutted and black-spectacled ? Not even for the right to join in as those men stood at attention, and chanted in the queer flat strains peculiar to the blind :

" How can we extol thee
Who are born of thee ? " . . .

Not even to be one of them, Richard ?

" Well, I wasn't born in England, so what does it matter ? "

But he was aware, in a positive flash of knowledge, that had he been permitted to go into the trenches and fight, it would have been bang there, between the eyes, that his bullet would have caught and shattered him . . . there, where the insult of the placard seemed first to have struck. He had not been allowed the choice of which blow ; so how could he ever prove to this coldly, carelessly exclusive England, how the choice would unquestioningly have swung ?

Half-an-hour later, as he stormed through the hall of Montagu House, he was greeted by the menace of Mr Gryce's voice, creaking, creaking. . . .

" Naturalized or unnaturalized, it's all the same—the leopard can't change his spots ! "

And the day was rounded to a perfect circle.

II

And after that, Mr Gryce's voice mixed itself up with pretty well everything; but particularly with Richard's three meals a day in the dining-room of Montagu Hall. He would like to have disappointed Mr Gryce by occasional absences from meals—taking it for granted that the Inquisitor does feel a certain disappointment at the absence of his victims from the rack; but, remembering David's remarks on patriotism locally applied, he forced himself to be present for his father's sake; forced his taciturnity to voluble talk, throwing up a screen between Ferdie and the enemy; or, if that failed, at least grandfather could sometimes be diverted from the muttered arrogance of patriotism—German patriotism—which might at any moment, *via* Mr Gryce's hearing, provoke a public scene. Richard dreaded a scene now as much as he had sought it at the incident of Con Rothenburg's death; it was as though his pugnacity had been wounded, and would not heal, and was raw-sensitive. . . .

Especially raw-sensitive to Mr Gryce; his pores were all open to Mr Gryce, who from merely ignoring the Marcus family, was suddenly subjecting them to active nagging persecution. The recent loss of the "Hampshire," with Lord Kitchener aboard, had resulted in another wave of anti-German feeling sweeping over the country. Richard hardly wondered at it; he was furiously resentful, furiously suspicious himself over the happening—but that did not prevent him from equal wrath when Mr Gryce considered himself patriotically entitled thereby to bang doors in Aunt Stella's face.

The truth was that both Richard and Mr Gryce were both afflicted with the same obsession—the internment of enemy aliens; to each of them, the war centred entirely on this point, radiating thence on spokes of lesser interest. But Mr Gryce was on his own territory.

Three meals a day! They met in the hall; they met on the stairs and landings; in the streets round about the house . . . but they passed with quickening step, averted eyes, and a twitching sense of the other's nearness. But those three meals a day had to be stolidly endured. Breakfast was worst, for then Mr Gryce read aloud the papers to his neighbours, and delivered his opinions—all *at* the Marcus table, for he never spoke to them directly. Richard tried being earlier than

Mr Gryce at breakfast . . . but then he had to see the pink head and the wisp of white beard travel down the room, sit down at the table, and with a certain unctuous deliberation, unfold the paper ; watch him . . . and then wait, with a cold sickness of anticipation, for the first rusty creak : " What do you think the Germans have been doing now ?——" How many thousand times more would he have to hear Mr Gryce's vicious inflexion of the word : Germans—(" He doesn't mean the fighting Germans, the Germans out there ; he means us ; he means me. . . .")

Presently it seemed to Richard that the creak of the voice and the pinkness of the head was mixing itself in with the very food he swallowed, poisoning it. . . .

For the boy had reached that state where he felt himself acutely and personally responsible for every atrocity committed by the Hun enemy ; his nerves shrank and cowered from each newly-printed horror or treachery or brutality, as from a thong laid across his bare shoulders. And there was always something —hospital ships sunk—English prisoners tortured—liner passengers drowned—poison gas—Zepp raids on non-combatants—wanton violation again and again of the code of decent warfare. Richard, tired out from the long day-to-day strain, only wanted the Germans for pity's sake to stop—if but for a little while, to *stop*. . . . All England had dwindled to Mr Gryce, and there was no one but Richard himself to stand forward and answer for all Germany's accumulating reproach !

He put up a gallant enough struggle to retain his fairness of vision. And presently his imagination, up to all sorts of tricks in these days, was able to see himself and his personality on the nerves of Mr Gryce, in exact replica of Mr Gryce on the nerves of Richard Marcus . . . saw the irritation in the curve of his own stolid ill-tempered shoulders—the antagonism aroused by his out-thrust underlip and the butting carriage of his head. . . . " Always that boy ! and a loyal Englishman has no option but to live in the same house, breathing the same air, eat and sit in the same room, tread the same carpet—it's a disgrace ! " Richard was so detachedly aware of this point of view that at certain hysterical moments of encounter he was not sure if he were driven out of the smoking-room by sight of that inevitable pink head, or whether he were banging the door with the hand of Mr Gryce's fury because those Marcus

shoulders were discovered humping in the armchair by the window.

He mistrusted an imagination as flexible. But the more he denied it and resented it, the more uncannily it functioned. Marcus of Winborough two years ago would have cut the present Marcus dead, dubbing him a freak . . . he saw that too.

He was far from desire to defend the Germans. He examined their conduct generally, their methods of warfare, with that new impartiality of his; gave them their due of victory, resource, consistency and stubborn devotion to their country; and nevertheless came to a conclusion that whereas a decent German might be almost as decent as a decent Briton, a rotten German is immeasurably rottener than the rottenest Briton. The sinking of hospital ships, for instance; wantonly to plunge into icy death the broken suffering bodies of men who had once already, perilously and with infinite care, been dragged back to life, and only asked now to be let rest with their own people again in their own land. Nothing could condone the sinking of hospital ships . . . and Richard had to clench his teeth on the longing to join hotly in the chorus of condemnation; as he had also to grind down the impulse to join the shouting when the news was good and glorious—"What have either of these to do with you?"

By unspoken pact, the Marcuses remained silent on these subjects, when in public; they did not gain much by the attitude, for people commented in whispers: "Have you noticed that they never have anything to say on our victories, or about the atrocities? Bound to have sympathies with the other side; wonder what they say among themselves?" On the other hand, if they expressed their perfectly spontaneous pleasure over an English feat of arms, and their quite unaffected indignation over a Hun outrage, they were instantly accused of hypocrisy and over-acting, and Mr Gryce said: "I like a German at least to *be* a German!"

It was a difficult problem, but on the whole, perhaps, silence solved it best. And Ferdie tried to impart to his son some of that placid philosophy which formed a firm basis to his more surface characteristics.

"My dear boy, what do you expect?—that in times like these the English will cherish us for our German origin? On the whole, they are lenient and fair-minded——"

"Yes, but they promised you—promised without reservation, that you should be as good as an Englishman, equal to any Englishman. And because it was the English who promised, we—you—we all thought it was all right . . ." his tone was heavy with reproach for the country which of all countries had a reputation for welcoming and sheltering those refugees from harsher lands and laws.

For Richard, in want of occupation, had begun to read lately; hoping to find in history the companionship of other children of No Man's Land; common-sense told him that in every war must have been a few examples of betwixt and between, belonging to both sides and therefore outcast from either side. He was comforted, in an odd sort of way, by this hunt through old tomes and chronicles, for precedent to his own position. Precedent that he could quote authoritatively to Ferdie, less well-informed.

"Be patient," said Ferdinand Marcus. "One day the war will be over, and all will be forgotten."

"Not it. Never. No foreigner will ever feel safe in England again."

"Why not? we suffer from inconvenience, not from tyranny."

"But in their heart of hearts they've chucked us out for good. . . . Haven't you heard old Gryce swear he'll never shake hands with a German again?"

Ferdie weighed the question of old Gryce with solemn deliberation, and then summed up: "Yes, he has the mania to persecute. One can understand—but one wishes he would not insult your aunt. But perhaps he has lost a son."

"Oh—is this Regent Street or Tuesday?" impatiently. "No forgivable link of cause and effect. Besides, he hasn't lost a son. He's not even married. It's just that he has nothing better to do. You never hear a fellow who's back from the Front, using himself up in anti-alien agitation. But old Gryce talks big about brave little Belgium—and then raises hell if the Belgians get served with the pudding before him at dinner. I'm not unreasonable, Dad; I can understand perfectly well that while the Germans are murdering our men and women it's natural that the relations of our murdered men and women find it painful to meet us, even though we're not the same Germans. That's why the internment penalty is a just penalty, I suppose; at any rate, I don't see how it

could be avoided. But petty nagging is different. There'd be some sense in the not-shaking-hands business if one could strike away a hand that was the concentrated essence of all that was foul in Germany——"

"I wonder," said Ferdinand slowly, "if you have any idea of all that *is* foul in Germany?—of what drove a whole colony to England in 1848?—the Acht-und-vierzigers, as they call themselves, those few who are still alive and whose sons are now part and parcel of the British Empire, bleeding for it. . . ."

"Eighteen-forty-eight?—that was a democratic revolt against the domination of Prussia over the smaller states, wasn't it?"

"Yes; the only way we could protest; we could hardly enter into Civil War—we who wanted only peace. The early socialists. So we escaped to England, and we are glad we escaped. We—well, I was not born yet; my turn came later, and was more solitary. But there lies the root of our antagonism to the fatherland that bore us; and that is what the English find so hard to understand in us now. They argue by analogy: because no Englishman can ever feel anything but an Englishman, so no German—etc. But the English nature is different . . . and besides, it has had no need for discontent; no need to exchange their own country for another. They think we still love Germany. But are we not here *because* we hate Germany? I have no wish to make speeches or to give you a history-lesson, Richard; but I sometimes wish, when I see you angry with me for—how did you once put it?—shoving you in a position with your feelings in one pocket and your birth-certificate in the other, I sometimes wish you realized a little better how you would have rebelled against German education and drill system and forced Imperialism; rebelled, or—worse still—submitted. You have noticed your grandfather, even now that he is old and ill and in a strange land, how rudely he still speaks, how dogmatically he thinks, how arbitrary are his judgments, and how he considers nobody. That is all military Germany embodied. There is another side to Germany, certainly, but it is crushed during war-time. Perhaps it will flower softly again afterwards——"

"Afterwards? Oh, father, will there ever be an afterwards? Will it be over by next year, do you think?"

(Next Autumn he would be eighteen. . . .)

The elder Marcus looked doubtful: "Who can tell? Have

you seen in to-day's paper?—there have been peace negotiations——"

"Anything *real*?"

And again: "Who can tell? You had better see for yourself. Here."

But Richard only made a pretext of seeing for himself. He dreaded reading the papers; made any sort of excuse not to do so. The papers were always full of allusions, direct or indirect, to naturalized and unnaturalized Germans, to spies in our midst, reproaches to the Government for laxness, incitements to reprisals, leagues for the future exclusion of Germans or semi-Germans, root and branch, from all association with civilized countries. Even if one hunted through the whole paper with ever-growing relief at one day, one issue, free from barbed reproach . . . . at the last, a small paragraph would surely catch the eye and destroy the momentary security. So Richard read no papers. The posters were bad enough, blatant or mysterious from the kerbstone; you could not avoid those, except by never stirring from the house . . . and in the house was Mr Gryce. Besides, there is no escape when the mind is spread like a net to catch all stray matter that has bearing on the one morbid obsession. Even when it is a question of going round the corner to have a pair of Aunt Stella's boots soled and heeled. . . .

In the little street were rival cobblers; one with the name: Marshall, obviously re-painted over a name possibly less pleasing to his customers; the other displaying a large placard in the window: "No German Taint *Here*!"

"Yes, but it's rather mean to make an advertisement out of it!" and Richard, against express orders, carried Aunt Stella's boots to Mr Marshall. The latter was a lank sad-faced individual with a slight cockney accent; he confided in Richard that he had unfortunately been born in Germany of a German father—— "but p'raps I oughtn't to be tellin' you this, sir?" "It's all right," gruffly. "Brought up over 'ere with me aunt and uncle who put me in the army—the reg'lar army, that is. Yes, oh yes, I wos a Tommy years before the war, an' went through all the Gallipoli part of it. 'Ot stuff!—I wos shipped home nearly dead from an explodin' shell. They discharged me out o' hospital at last, an' discharged me from the army; an' I took over me late uncle's job 'ere. No, I'm not partial to cobblin'; I tried most other things, but

they won't 'ave me nowhere, being so to speak, a German, sir. They ask very particular, you see, nowadays. And this isn't payin', neither . . . not by any manner of means. Customers remember the name. Fact is, sir, I'm afraid I shall 'ave to be quick with these 'ere boots—I'm wantin' to oblige you, since you brought 'em 'ere, but I'm obliged to shut up shop next week."

"What will you do?"

"Nothing for me to do but ask 'em to intern me, sir. A man can't starve. Wot I'm fearin' rather, is that them in the internment camp won't make me over welcome neither, me havin' fought against 'em, and bein' mostly English in my ways."

Richard whistled . . . "What an old muddle it is! I'm in the same box," he added, envying the man his Gallipoli experience, exploding shell and all.

"Yes, I know, sir; or I wouldn't 'ave been so bold——"

"Know? How do you know?" God! there surely could not be anything German in his appearance . . . horrible thought!

"It's talked about among the folks in the neighbourhood, sir; there's a gentleman at Montagu 'All as isn't too friendly to you, I believe; an' 'e seems to have told the policeman at the corner to keep a sharp eye——"

"I see. Thanks. Good-day."

Mr Gryce. And the mythical policeman of Otto Rothenburg's dread, materialized at last. Not that it mattered; there was nothing for him to find out. "May as well make up my mind to the fact that I'm a criminal," muttered Richard with a grim smile. It was part of the nightmare that his absolute belief that the foundations of things were "all right," solid ground upon which the foot might solidly tread, had now been shaken to this . . . this ricketiness. "I *can't* be a German—I don't *like* the Germans!" his cry of a year ago, had been incredulous of a state of the world in which such things could happen. Now: "I haven't *done* anything!"—but his tone was acceptance that such things did happen, and therefore anything could happen, and go on happening . . . who or what was left to stand security?

"When will the boots be ready?" Aunt Stella enquired.

"Early next week."

"As soon as that?"

Richard explained.

"I told you to take them to the other man," displeased.

"Thought poor old Marshall needed encouragement."

"Then leave encouragement to people in a different position. I've warned you before that we must be careful."

Stella was certainly careful; the most careful of the family. She would have nothing to do with the lady who recently came to Montagu Hall and who gave Richard one moment of sardonic happiness by demanding of Mr Gryce, in innocent and guttural friendliness: "Haf you got a dable-dime, my Sir?"

Mr Gryce, more successful with her than with the Marcuses—perhaps her credentials were less unimpeachable—had her removed within a week; but not before she had thrice beamingly tried to attach herself to Stella, under the false impression that here at least she was bound to find kindly compatriotism and shelter, and thrice had suffered a chilling snub delivered without consideration for her possible feelings: "She's ever so much more German than we are," Stella explained to the other members of her family; "we really can't risk it—in our position! Just as well that old Gryce is getting rid of her."

Richard thought: "It'll be us next. . . ."

He did not say so. After his one outburst to Ferdie, he never mentioned Mr Gryce to him again . . . could not, somehow, get the name past a thickness in his throat. The three Marcuses imagined that Richard did not notice Mr Gryce and his malignant attitude—("Richard was never observant!") . . . He was glad for them to believe it. Mr Gryce had taken it upon himself, of late, to warn every fresh arrival at Montagu Hall, of the deadly growth in their midst. Richard watched him do it once, from the other end of the long drawing-room; he could have strode out, certainly; but, for discipline of that unruly sense of fear, he forced himself deliberately to witness the give-away; one did not surrender to fear without a struggle. But . . . Mr Gryce worked himself into his sleep, now, and made it hideous. He dreamt wildly of scenes with Mr Gryce, in which, instead of hurling at him all the wounding, tearing speeches repressed during the day—which might have been some relief—he was compelled instead to follow him about, pleading his case, over and over again: "Don't you—*can't* you understand—it isn't my fault? It's nobody's fault. You can't stop yourself from hating us, but you couldn't have stopped yourself from being born in Germany either—oh, do

try and see that. . . ." It was perfectly damnable to have to plead with Mr Gryce, even in sleep, and to be helpless in preventing the subconscious self from these humiliating displays. "Can—I—help—for—it?" . . . Why, that was what Gottlieb Schnabel had gasped. . . . Mixed up with his dreams, the old sick dream of a flour-smeared face cowering from his pursuers—from Richard—from Richard himself. . . .

His punishment, these slow fear-bitten months; punishment for his previous denseness of imagination. Yes, yes, but it has gone on so long, and there seems no end to it, and I'm tired and frightened and beaten—beaten to my knees. You who send punishment and You who can stay it, let it be over now. . . .

III

"Are you alone?"

"Richard!"

Deb shrank with a cold sense of shock at sight of his face, from which all fleshiness had contracted to a drawn covering of the bony structure; hollows in the cheeks; hard mouth; and eyes that had known persecution. . . . "Richard, what is it? I haven't seen you for about six weeks. Have you been ill?"

"No. I say, are you alone?"

"Yes; La Ilorraine and Manon won't be in for ages."

"You—you—you've got to marry Samson Phillips."

"I mean. . . . I want you to," when he saw her choking bewilderment.

Deb perceived that he was in extremes. "I'll do anything, Richard." She just touched him with her hand. And he stumbled forward and put his head down in her lap and began to cry.

"Richard . . . dear old boy . . ." she was athrill with terror now. It was horrible to hear him, with the knowledge how his normal self, the self which for seventeen years had stood for all that was chunky and gruff and pugnacious, was abhorring, or would presently return to abhor, this sudden utter breakdown of all control. "Tell me—oh do tell me," Deb pleaded to the hunched suffering curve o his shoulders.

"They won't leave us alone . . . the pink heads. Deb—

rows of pink heads everywhere—you can see them from the top—yes, sitting round tables . . . all over England : ' Intern the Alien Enemy.' But it isn't that so much ; I'm getting used to the thought of it, for me ; one year—not quite—and I shall be interned. . . . What's the word make you feel ?—cold iron and damp black earth. But it isn't that——"

" What is it then, dear ? "

" Deb, d'you know why England and Germany are fighting ? Such a silly reason !—to find out if Goethe or Shakespeare was the greatest. Lothar said so."

" We're fighting to keep England a free country," Deb spoke clearly and simply as to a child . . . her young brother was even less than a child in his shaken hysterical outpourings.

" Are we ? I've been thinking too much, thinking all the time, and all round. . . . I want to stop thinking, but I don't know where to begin to stop, or why I ever started to think. . . . Something happened to Gottlieb Schnabel and he screamed —but it was quite right, Deb, he was a German ; he shouldn't have left Germany ; perhaps his father brought him here and didn't have him naturalized ; if he'd stopped over there he might have fought for his country—tho' he'd have been a rotten fighter. Anyway, the Germans wouldn't have him now. They wouldn't have me."

" But even if—you'd never—— ? . . . *Richard* ! "

He was silent, too tired to attempt to tell her of all the bludgeonings his spirit had received since that evening in the May of 1915. " But I'd still knock down the fellow who hinted that I cared a curse for any country except England . . . England. . . ."

But England had informed him fifty times a day, and by fifty different methods, subtle and brutal, that she had no need of him, no use for him, preferred to do without him, doubted and despised him. . . . Loyalty crept shivering into a corner at last . . . loyalty was apathetic, numb——

" What's the good ? It just has to be like this. They'd persecute me in Germany for being English, worse than in England for being German. And the neutral countries are all getting sucked in one side or the other. . . . I thought once we could all go to America. What's the good ! everybody's fighting for something they believe in ! everybody's got their back to the wall . . . there's not even a wall for us ; only dropping spaces. . . . No Man's Land. . . . I dream of it

when I fall asleep—nowhere to go—and reeling pushes from all sides—you spin round and round, and your brain spins round and round—nowhere to go and nowhere to rest—for Thomas Spalding and me. . . . You hope it's going to end, but it doesn't, and they hate us worse every day . . . they hate us worse than they hate the real Germans. . . . I don't know why, I don't know what we've *done*—except perhaps that we're here and near at hand ; it's more fun to hate something that's near, isn't it ? We hang on and try to prove that we're loyal and all right . . . the hate seems to be receding . . . and then something happens—and naturally it all rolls up again. Deb, it's a double treachery when one of our lot betrays England to Germany—they betray us to England at the same time . . . and you can see the pink heads bobbing. . . ."

"The war will be over one day."

The boy lifted his face ; showed her the eyes of a fighter crucified to inaction :

"And what sort of a world do you suppose it will be, after the war, for men who haven't fought in the war ? The others will talk and remember—and I'll be shut outside their talk and memories. They'll have suffered, and lost their pals, and helped their pals through with it—I shall have suffered nothing and lost nothing and helped no one. I—oh, I was kept safe . . . in cold storage ! God ! the meanest little whelp of a Servian or Bulgarian, German, Turk, or Belgian—it doesn't matter what side, when you're in the scrum, heart and soul—he will have taken a risk denied to me. I'm funking life after the war, worse even than to-day and to-morrow and next week—and next Autumn. Didn't know I was a funk, did you, Deb ? "

She asked slowly : "Will it really do you any good, if I marry Samson Phillips ? "

And Richard got up, frowning. "No. What makes you ask that ? "

"You said—when you came in——"

"Did I ? " he muttered. "I didn't know—didn't mean to. I'm all in bits ; don't take any notice." He dug his hands into his pockets, and walked away to the window.

It was significant that he growled out no apologies for having cried. That he should be capable of such a thing was accepted, wearily, with the other horrors.

Queer how the very bend of his neck made his sister feel sore with tenderness . . . she *must* help him butt through his bad hour. And she reproached herself for neglecting him all this while—Richard, whom she loved better than any other.

"Is Samson in England again?"

"Yes. In hospital. Trench feet. David told me. Said that Uncle Otto still wants him for Nell. Somebody English in the family, to grab on to."

"Oh—Uncle Otto!" Deb's tone rang scornfully.

"Yes—I used to laugh at him, too. I don't now. We—we come down to that, Deb, when we're in a panic."

"Was that what you meant, what you hoped, when you told me I must marry Samson? Somebody to grab on to?"

Richard nodded. "Yes. But never mind. You don't care enough for him, do you?"

"How could he help you."

"He's solid English through and through; have you noticed how people imagine that every Jew must be a German—or every German a Jew—I forget which. But Phillips' cousin is Sir Ephraim Phillips; David seemed to think he was going to be useful over Furth, get a permit for Hedda to see him oftener—only David says Hedda doesn't want to. If he were to vouch for me, perhaps—they listen to a man who has enlisted from the very beginning, and got the M.C." A long pause . . . and then Richard whispered under his breath, with the reverence of a pilgrim who speaks of his Mecca: "He might perhaps have got me into the trenches. . . ."

Presently he jerked out, in his roughest manner: "Look here, Deb, old girl—forget all this. Perfect rot, really. Don't suppose he could do anything—much. I was simply mooching about—and—and a poster or something got on my nerves and sent me pelting down here. I wouldn't for worlds have you bother about Phillips when you're not keen on him. Not fair on him, either."

"I was wondering how you guessed, that's all . . ." Deb's head was turned away from him; he stared incredulously at the wavy black mop of hair—what had she done to her hair? . . .

"Guessed?"

"That—I made such a fool of myself. . . . Oh, Richard! that I chucked away everything last year—just for a bit of fun."

"When you put him off by—Deb, you—you're not bluffing? you've cared all this while?"

"Yes. . . . And now you tell me he's back, I wonder if I could put things right again—I do wonder. . . ."

"But you told me at the time that you were laughing, pulling his leg . . ." Richard hardly dared believe in this secret of his sister's which synchronized so marvellously with his own petition.

She stamped a petulant foot at him. "I *was* laughing—because I was too ashamed to own up that I'd hurt myself by teasing him with that idiot lie of mine about Cliffe. I thought you would have guessed—I thought you *had* guessed, when you first lugged in Samson's name, and were only pretending that bit about Uncle Otto and yourself and influence, for—for cover; to cover me. I thought it was so nice of you. Richard"—she walked straight up to him, and put her arms round his neck, looking steadily at his eyes, those sombre, tortured eyes which were beginning already to lighten hopefully and lose some of their strain—"Richard, own up; it was that, wasn't it?"

Play-acting. But she had done it so long and inconsequently and for no one's sake at all, surely now she was justified in play-acting to the tip of her powers, at Richard, and for Richard's sake. . . .

"Wasn't it?"

"No. No, Deb. It was sheer selfishness. But if you can . . . if you honestly do love him. . . ."

CHAPTER V

I

Deb, before Richard came to her, was afflicted with the hump. A sort of diffused hump. The hump of all the world. The hump that says: "What's the good?" and "It isn't fair!" and "I wish——" and "Everything's so hateful!" It arose from a blurred medley of causes: the dry heat which seemed to spring from the pavements and sap all vitality. Then Con's death; Con had been her first love, and his death stabbed her with a quick and poignant memory of eight years ago when they had nuzzled each other like two affectionate and sportive young foals—"*dear* little Deb." "Con—I *do* love you, Con!" "For always, Deb?" "Yes, for—I say, look how the conkers are bumping down in this wind . . . let's collect them and have a battle, shall we?" "Rather!" and the headlong scamper of boy and girl up the hill towards the group of tattered, wind-buffeted chestnuts. Such glorious fun, collecting into your own separate pile the vivid russet pebbles that every fresh gust thudded and bounced on to the grass; or even, while you knelt and scrambled, on to the flat of your back. Such fun, sweeping aside the drifts of mottled yellow leaves to discover where they hid. Such fun, to shout aloud to Con a find of the embedded conker, red and plump and shining in its dull white pillow and prickly burr. Such fun, the after battle, swooping to gather fresh handfuls from your accumulated store of ammunition. She could be quite sure, always, that Con would never direct his bullets to hit her anywhere except in places that didn't hurt. Con was a dear . . . and never such a dear as on that wind-rushed, sun-flashing afternoon in October, when the Battle of the Conkers having been decided in her favour, they flung themselves down on the dry protesting rustle of the dead-leaf carpet, flushed and tingling and ever so pleased with themselves; the clouds swirling apart over their heads to show such vivid rollicking patches of blue. "Deb, *darling*—will—

will you let me kiss you just once?" "No, Con—please—I don't think you ought. . . ."

Well, Con was dead. But that memory was more excellent to look back upon, than the long, slow-moving hours spent with Blair Stevenson in his rooms. . . .

It was not Blair's fault. She recognized that. He was always charming, always interesting, even whimsically fond of his demi-maid. He was a great deal better than she deserved, really. Only—only——

"I'm sick of it!" with a spurt of impetuous dissatisfaction. Sick of it, and did not know how to wriggle clear of it. Perhaps the Foreign Office would soon send him abroad again. Deb was prone to hang about, hoping for some lucky mechanical chance to terminate her mistakes, rather than herself make abrupt severance. Stevenson was indeed sent on an important mission to America that July of 1916. And Deb did not altogether like that either. She missed him. He was, at least, aware of her. The old dejected sensation of waste enveloped her again.

The endless processions of khaki spectres through the great dim stations, on their way to the Front, wound like a drab caterpillar through her days and nights. She had loved being on duty at the canteen when the leave trains came in; but this new job was different—it was horrible. They were sucked back to the Front where Con had been killed. And the world was left full of women—women and girls and old women. The world was rather like that great dim station, with hollow sounds clanging and echoing far up in the roof, and trains that came in and trains that went out, nobody quite knew when; and waiting, drearily, up and down the platform; and an old, old time-table that offered no guidance in this later chaos, flapping from the walls. . . .

What guidance was there, moral or religious or traditional? Women took their cues and rules from one another, propped one another up by new and hastily-made standards; pointed out solitary examples—solitary pioneers. Dimly-lit melancholy world of women, invertebrate at first, learning how to walk and run, learning how to do without their men. Bits of a new code, and bits of an old tradition. A great deal of talk . . . women's voices. . . .

Women, and women, and women. One got nauseated by one's own sex. They did their best—they did splendidly—

but oh, the man's deeper, calmer note, and more logical authority, and firm hand outstretched !

The home with La Ilorraine and Manon was hardly as satisfactory as it had seemed. The *ingénue* engaged, required kicking—not from jealousy, but because of her demeanour which implied that everything good comes to the good girl. And Dolph Carew, whom Deb hated, was always in the flat. Wedding preparations were in full swing. And La Ilorraine, the sails of her content wide and voluptuously full with a fair wind, treated Deb in the confidential manner of one battered old *rouette* to another—inviting her perpetually to look and rejoice at the spectacle of the two innocent young things so happy. " You and I, my dee-urr, have long since outgrown such milk and roses." . . . It galled Deb, not unreasonably, to be identified with La Ilorraine as a *rouette* of fifty years ago. Manon was to marry Dolph Carew . . . inevitably Deb's thoughts drifted back to Jenny—lingered there . . . all that wish and desire and beat for life wasted . . . and that charming little face, mournful or roguish as a monkey's. " But Bobby's left ; Bobby with the same crinkle in his eyes and mouth and heart. . . . If I were to die, wanting things like Jenny did, there would not even be Bobby to remind people. . . ."

Yes—she had the hump. The hump of all the world. And then Richard came.

At once life lost its sullen taste ; and was sharp with the savour of brine. Something to do—and that not too easy. Something to be won—and that not for herself, but for Richard. Something to sacrifice—and that was contemplation of the future ; fatal to brood upon a future inhabited principally by Phillipses. Something here which demanded subtle manipulation, probably histrionics . . . but this was Deb's talent. She set out to re-conquer Samson Phillips in a spirit which was brewed in equal parts of roguery and swagger and trepidation. Could she or could she not obliterate her senseless fib of last autumn ? It all depended, really, on how much Samson cared for her, and of what enduring fibre was his passion. And here Deb had confidence ; she could not forget that he had asked her to marry him—so few men had asked her that, down all that long, dusty highway speckled with men. . . .

" If it can be wangled, it shall be wangled," she promised

Richard in her heart. She was not very considerate of Samson in the matter; but you cannot be too scrupulous of one man when you wish supremely to serve another.

From Nell Redbury she obtained Captain Phillips' temporary address, and also the exact ailment from which he was suffering. It would not do to make a mistake in that. Then she composed a letter that in its simple idiocy and clear grasp of Samson's psychology, was quite a little masterpiece of guile:

"Dear Captain Phillips,

"I hear that you are back again and in hospital, with trench-feet. I'm so very sorry. Though I'm afraid you won't care much if I'm sorry or not. And yet—this letter is really to ask if you'll let me come and see you, just once? Of course, I know it's my fault that we're not good friends. But please, please don't snub me. It does hurt so to be snubbed. Is there anything special you would like me to bring you, in case you say I may come? Flowers I know you love best, but flowers are nicest when they are wild in the fields, aren't they? I wish you could have seen our little brook near Market St Bryan last month; its banks were a blue heaven of forget-me-nots. Do you ever think about it, I wonder?

"Yours very sincerely,
"Deb Marcus."

She re-read this epistle, and crossed out the last sentence. "It won't do to frighten him; I wish I could work in a little old-world touch of dignity." She mused; then unable to supply this, sent it off as it was.

She had not miscalculated the durance of Samson's affection. He was a stubborn man, and he had deliberately selected Deb. Deb had dealt his sense of righteousness a hard buffet; but he had not succeeded in forgetting her. Her letter struck exactly the right note—diffident yet impetuous; just the same dear, warm-hearted, half-shy, half-wild little girl . . . surely she must have been led astray by some scoundrel. After all, she had been honest at the time; honest enough to forfeit his regard and all it entailed, by that confession of her sin. The sin could not be minimized—but here she was,

obviously penitent—he could not resist the delicious act of magnanimity.

So he replied stiffly, saying he would be delighted if she were to pay him a visit at the hospital between three and four on the following Wednesday. He had made arrangements with his sister-in-law, Nell Redbury, to be present. . . .

This last, with that insistence on a rigorous and formal respect necessary in such painful cases where respect could not any more be taken for granted as the lady's due.

Deb smiled when she received it. "Nell can easily be shunted. Is white muslin too obvious? I s'pose so. It had better be my spotted pink, which is a bad fit. And the Leghorn hat with the spray of Alexandra roses that doesn't match the dress. Surely no girl would wear two mouldy shades of pink unless she were a reformed character. Good Lord! my hair! How am I to account for it?"

She fingered a temptation to dare the risk of winning him back by means he most disapproved of—peacock and gold jumper of the wickedest cut; conversation to match, all a-flicker with brilliant unconventionality; the siren method? It would be infinitely more fun; and a personal triumph if she succeeded.

But no. Richard's peace of mind hung on the issue; she must take the safest way.

II

Ten days later, Samson for the fourth time proposed to her. She accepted him.

After the first interview, it was easy. She had only to be passive; or to smooth down any little creases in her texture that she perceived could still cause him uneasiness. That first interview was her greatest performance. She blended timid womanly solicitude with that type of earnest frankness in big and little things, which was to be interpreted—by him—as the outcome of an inner consciousness of once having failed greatly in moral steadfastness and the resolve never again to be betrayed into so doing. She thought his intelligence could be trusted to perceive that much subtlety, unaided. He did perceive it. And approved. He approved also of her confusion at his jocular reference to the forget-me-not stream.

" Don't tell me you went down there alone to pick forget-me-nots ? " " Oh, but I did. I wouldn't——" she stopped. And hastily asked him how he liked his tea. " Wouldn't go with any other man." . . . Samson smiled under his moustache. So that special glide of silver beneath the plank bridge, had associations for her, too. Good ! he liked sentiment in girls. He was a sentimental chap himself, but in his case it was sheathed in sternness. He was a soldier—and she was a sinner. . . . Never let him forget that.

She never let him forget it. Not once in the prescribed hour. Intuition pointed out that it was labour lost to try and make him forget. Therefore he must be brought to forgive.

" So Delilah has been shorn instead of Samson ? That's poetic justice, isn't it ? " Then, chaffing no more : " What made you cut your hair, Deb ? I don't like it. It's like those artist-model girls you see about. I hoped you'd go on arranging it the way Beattie did it for you, once. It suited you."

" But it took so long," Deb explained. And further, in an outburst of confidence : " It was stupid of me—I'm sorry now. But—it was just a mood—one evening, when I had to dash off to the canteen—and it *would* keep on flopping down after I'd pinned it up . . . and it seemed to me there was so much to do in the world just now, beside one's hair—so much to do and so little time to do it in—And . . . Oh, I lost my temper with it and just sheared it off. Does it look hideous ? "

He studied her in silence. And his face turned red and his eyes slowly kindled. . . .

" Not that it matters. Vanity is rather futile since the war, isn't it ? But one can't help minding being a fright. . . ."

" You're not a fright, little girl," said Samson Phillips.

And then Nell slipped back inconspicuously into the room, and said it was time to go.

Otto Redbury had rubbed his hands with pleasure when Samson, via Beatrice, had made known his wish for Nell's attendance at the hospital between three and four on Wednesday afternoon.

" So ! it gomes to something, then ! " and he inspected Nell before her departure, and gave her five shillings for a taxi, that she might arrive unheated and unruffled. The taxi had stopped at La llorraine's, to pick up Deb, but this Otto did not know. Deb was very glad to arrive at the hospital unheated and unruffled. And Nell was very glad to spend the stray

half-hour walking beside Timothy, whom Deb had notified to be accidentally outside the gates at that hour of the day. This Otto did not know either. Not that he could have gained much by prying on their dialogue, for the pair were still in that stage of dreamy ecstasy which prefers not to speak, in addition to their handicap of excessive shyness.

"Soon, zere vill be a vedding at the Synagogue," Otto prophesied to Trudchen. But Trudchen, who had lost one of her boys, had no happiness for the moment in either of her girls.

Otto was right in form but not in detail A wedding did indeed take place on October the 12th, and Nell was bridesmaid ; and the bride was given away by her father ; and Otto for the look of things had to be coaxed out of the bathroom by his united family, and coaxed into a frock-coat, and coaxed into attendance as a guest. Otto's soul was very bilious, and he objected to paying for a present, and made several quite snappy and spiteful remarks concerning the folly of men who married a girl whose certificate of chastity bore a black mark and the scrawled name of Mr Cliffe Kennedy. . . .

"Ach, Otto !"

Samson was aware of the enormity of such a choice. Aware, too, that he would have great difficulty with his family, who were still huffy with Deb for having dared to refuse Samson on three previous occasions. So he did an unprecedented thing —he proposed first, and consulted his family afterwards. Perhaps "proposed" is not the term which exactly sets forth his proceedings. He announced to Deb that he was willing to make her his wife—nay, that he considered it his duty to draw her from the gutter back to the pavement. Deb—who in spite of some deep inner scoldings that she was again behaving disgracefully towards Samson, and this time worse even than before—Deb stood before him with eyes downcast and folded hands, meek and wan—and wildly exhilarated by her success. She had, to quote La llorraine : "Made a muff from her chances" so often and so disastrously that a great deal of previous anxiety was inevitable. Anxiety was now allayed. She stood before her master, meek and wan, and exceedingly desirable : Israelite maiden in the slave-market. . . . Samson kissed her very carefully to show that his respect had suffered no diminishment. (He was so continually showing her this in all sorts of unobtrusive ways that Deb only now realized to

what extent her lie of last year had earned his undying censure.) Samson kissed her carefully—and said, "My family will be pleased about this, Deb."

For which she rather liked him.

The family, of course, reminded him in an appalled chorus that Deb was—somewhat disreputable. Had she not run away from home, to live with that opera-woman? Samson replied inflexibly that they, by their contempt and reproach, might be responsible for driving a poor little girl to worse things.

"What worse things are there?" his grandmother demanded, for the rest of them.

Samson merely shrugged; and opposition perceived that the eldest son of the house of Phillips had chosen, and would not be swerved from his choice. His glucose fidelity was impressive. Samson was the Phillips' fetish, and Samson's wish the Phillips' law. Moreover, there remained still the Phillips' illusion that Deb had always loved Samson, had loved him all through his three proposals last Autumn, and must—poor child—have suffered terribly, refusing him. Certainly she deserved to suffer. But by this chance of making Samson happy, she might expiate her foolishness, and expiate it still more in giving Samson a fine healthy son. . . . So the many counsels in the dining-room of Mrs Phillips resolved at last on a programme of bounteous welcome, forgive and forget.

Deb, foreseeing complications, made more than one faltering attempt to explain privately to her fiancé exactly how the quaint mistake about her premature initiation had occurred. . . . But it was an impossible task. At each successive essay, Samson interrupted at the very start and in his well-known style: "I don't want to hear a word about it, Deb. It's all over and it's all forgotten. Let's turn over a fresh leaf and agree never to mention it again. I love you, and you know it, and nothing makes any difference, and I simply don't want to hear another word about it."

So she gave in. She was the flame, he was the extinguisher that stands beside the candle. However ardent her whim to burn, he could always put her out.

Ferdie Marcus was enraptured at the betrothal. It was what he had always desired for his little daughter—everyone was prefixing Deb with "little" just now—a good protector; a Jew; a husband in a solid position, both financially and—nowadays this was important—in point of nationality. He

would never be quite healed of the unlooked-for wound dealt him by this same little daughter, last year ; and he was rather puzzled as to how that affair had been glossed over where Samson was concerned. Did Samson know ? But he hid both the scar and the perplexity ; and without any formal reconciliation, it was understood that she had slipped into re-occupation of her old place in the home—home in the abstract and not literal sense ; for she did not return to live at Montagu Hall. Neither Grandfather nor Aunt Stella were sufficiently cordial at the prospect ; and Samson did not care either about the boarding-house. For the present he made special arrangement that she should stay with the Redburys—Beattie and Hardy. She should be married from his mother's house, and as he was to be discharged from hospital in a month's time, the wedding could quite well be arranged for October. In fact (" I'm a sentimental chap ! ") he asked Deb, with a twinkle of meaning in his eye, whether October the 12th would suit her ? Just in time to prevent her features from slipping into utter blankness, she remembered that this might be the anniversary of the silvery-stream business, and replied with a pretty smile, that she thought October the 12th would be . . . nice.

" Will there be time to let your hair grow before then ? " he teased her. " We can't have a bride with short hair. . . ."

The whole Phillips family had pounced, jabbering and shrieking and with white teeth all aflash in their olive faces, on the discovery that Delilah and not Samson had been shorn. Deb was prepared for this, and constant repetition of the joke did not afflict her in the measure of last year. The Phillips were themselves a joke, and her engagement, and Samson, and Otto Redbury sulking in the bathroom on the occasion of her formal visit on the arm of her fiancé ; and the fact that she must ostentatiously refuse ever to meet Cliffe Kennedy again . . . all a joke ! That was her mood, and it was not once interpierced. She saw very little of her old set during her engagement—very little of Gillian and Antonia and Zoe. All that had dropped away like a whirl of sparks in the forgotten night.

The sense of a hilarious joke followed her to the very porch of the Synagogue, pursued her through the ceremony, with its gabble of Hebrew and wonderful song. It prodded her midway in the fatherly old Rabbi's personal benediction, when he solemnly addressed Samson in these terms : " You are bearing

away to a typically Jewish home a typically Jewish treasure. . . ." Deb felt irresistibly impelled to drop her eyelids and murmur deprecatingly: "Oh, no . . ." and Samson patted her arm reassuringly. . . .

And then the joke faded . . . for the old man spoke directly to her, and made her feel suddenly that at last she belonged; that this was her faith, and these her people; and that standing here under the white canopy, she was really fulfilling her destiny at last—the destiny for which Deb Marcus had been primarily shaped and intended. After all, she had not been able to achieve free adventure—and compromise was a poor substitute. It was kind of Jehovah to have guided her from debatable ground to safety.

And she would cease from baffling and bamboozling Samson, who was high-principled and faithful. What had she made out of her loose-jointed set of values, to enable her to scoff at his? Deb was now full to the brim of her being with contrition and clear sweetness and gratitude. . . . A few yards away Ferdie was beaming happily—Dear old dad—and she had been such a beast, blaming him for all her own freakish behaviour. And there was Richard, scowling a little self-consciously in his endeavour to appear absolutely at ease—all Samson's brothers were already married and ineligible for the office of best man, which devolved therefore upon Richard . . . brows hunched over eyes that were wonderfully at peace. Six weeks ago, he had looked like a man of thirty; now he looked what he was—a sturdy well-blocked-out pugnacious youngster of seventeen. It was all right—Deb had spoken to Samson about him, and Samson had spoken to his cousin Sir Ephraim Phillips, who had promised when the time of internment drew actually near, to interest himself, not only to the extent of (certainly) getting Richard off, but furthermore to get him (perhaps) into the fighting line somewhere. So Richard's state was that of a parched creature who had sighted water to slake his thirst. . . .

All the same, it was no joke being responsible for the ring and the fees—and the carriages and—and half-a-dozen other things. It rendered a properly nonchalant bearing impossible. And he had made a bad beginning by the reverent removal of a sleek silk hat from a sleek bullet head, directly on entrance . . . five bearded gentlemen draped in black had made a rush at him and besought him to replace his hat upon his head.

His eyes met his sister's in a swift comprehending glance. "Sure it's all right, Deb—for you, I mean?" "Quite, quite sure, old boy!" the unspoken question and answer between them.

The glass was set in the neighbourhood of Samson's foot, and he ground it vindictively into powder. His mother at the reception afterwards, called all her friends and relatives to bear witness with what spirit he had performed this part of the ritual. It was fortunate that she did not overhear David Redbury's remark to the effect that Samson had not only used all the energy which his great prototype had expended on the pillars of the temple, to crush one small wine-glass; but had then further deviated from Biblical history by inviting the Philistines home with him to champagne and iced cake. . . .

"Oh, hush, David!" from Nell.

"Well—look at us!" Israel was indeed enormously represented. The rooms glimmered and glittered with the clan Phillips. Already they owned Deb ("little Deb"); swarmed about her in heavy, jocular proprietorship; bore her triumphantly away to be robed for the honeymoon journey.

Mr and Mrs Samson Phillips left at 4.30, *en route* for Torquay.

. . . . . .

"Why did you ever tell me that falsehood?"

"I—I don't know, Samson. What falsehood?"

"You do know, Deb."

"I don't know why I told it, Samson."

"You've always been a good girl." It was a statement, not a query. A statement weighted with perplexity.

And: "Yes . . ." she assented, "I've always been a good girl."

He was not so joyfully illuminated as might have been expected. Indeed, he was conscious of being defrauded of an essential occupation. He had married Deb, forgiving her. He had meant to go on forgiving her. He would never stop forgiving her. Now, in place of these anticipations, was a vacuum. . . .

PART IV

CHAPTER I

NELL and Timothy lay among thick buttercups. Here and there the shimmering, glazed yellow lifted to circles of pale cowslips. Nell's russet silk jersey was a splash of deeper colour in all the gold ; the spilt pollen trembled on her loosened plaits of hair, the lustreless heavy brown of water densely overhung. Timothy thought he had never seen anyone more beautiful . . . and he was flying over to France the next day.

"Nell——"

"Wait a minute, Tim. . . . I'm thinking." She dared order him to wait, this fair young hero of hers. Because she had learnt to believe, through a year of wonder, and hesitation, and ignorance shaken into discernment, that he was indeed hers. And with belief came power—oh, what strange new power in her deep look . . . young Nell knew everything now —all about feelings and life and colour . . . she knew what feelings were when Timothy's hand lay on her bare arm ; and life was—Oh, but she mustn't tell . . . not yet . . . you wouldn't understand, because it's all got to do with Timothy. And colour was what happened to Timothy if near to him she stirred or brushed his khaki sleeve. . . .

She lay on her back among the buttercups ; staring into the sky, and thinking.

"You see," at last, "it's such a Great Responsibility."

He nodded, and echoed her phrase : "Yes—it's No End of a Responsibility ! "

He said this whenever they discussed the subject, and with a more profound air of worry each time. And they had discussed it so often. That New Generation ! it really gave a fellow a terrific lot to think about.

"It isn't as if it were just you and me, Tim. That would be so easy to settle. But—it's all the others. Just think, Timothy, how many are being beaten down to be miserable just because they dare not walk away, be happy—like Gillian ! "

"It's awful!" Timothy's eyes were round and solemn. . . . He was not frightfully keen on the New Generation. Had he been a rollicking youngster, he would have puffed it away in a laugh. But he followed laboriously where Nell led . . . and thus got his answer, from the lips of the acolyte and the disciple, to the question he had once put to Blair Stevenson: "Yes, but what's it all *about*? What are they up to, these girls?"

"Look here, Nell. . . . I do so want to—to marry you. I've told you billions of times. Darling . . ." he dropped to a whisper; "Darling, I could get a special licence; *won't* you? now that——." He meant to say "Now that I'm off to-morrow," but bit back the words, holding to an unspoken pact among the young men who go into the fighting line, that the "last-day-of-all" leverage is not a fair one to use in the shift of a girl's will.

"I *can't* marry you, Tim. How could I ever look Gillian in the face again? After she's been so brave and wonderful . . . just to show us all the way . . . it's simply nothing to follow, after someone else has gone first!"

"But——" Timothy stopped, his light thick eyebrows were drawn to a puzzled frown. Then he started off again—"I don't see what *harm* it does anyone, us being married?"

"Marriage—is—obsolete," said Nell, with absolute dead certainty. "And we owe it to the future, Timothy."

"Owe what?"

"Not to give in."

Nell was resolved not to give in. And hers was a nature of such thick obstinacy as Timothy had not even begun to suspect. There was little of Deb's pliability about young Nell. Impressionable she was, unexpectedly, as in the case of her unswerving, unquestioning devotion to Gillian Sherwood, but she could not be readily diverted this way and that, as could Deb. *This* way—but not *that*.

"If we gave in and got married in the old stupid fashion, then dozens of other twos might do it because we did."

"Would that matter?" Timothy asked unhappily.

She flashed: "Oh, if you'd rather be just anybody instead of Pioneers——" Then reproachfully, "You pretended to agree last time we talked about it. You oughtn't to pretend, Timothy, because it makes me sort of step on something which I'm quite sure is there but isn't—like that funny, hateful feeling

when you go up one stair too much in the dark—d'you know ? "

" Yes. But it's not so bad as when you don't come down one stair enough."

" Yes, it is. It's worse. Your way only makes one fall and hurt oneself . . . it's quite ordinary. But the other way gives you a—an inside feeling . . . oh, I don't know—like a shock ! "

" Well, anyway," said Tim, trying to regain forfeited ground, " I wasn't pretending. Of course the idea is wonderful about being pioneers, and not minding—and—and going first to clear away the rubbish for the others. And of course I think it no end plucky of Gillian to go and live with the fellow she loves, nor bother a cuss about being married or anything. But—*need we* ? " He added : " You're different, Nell . . . that's what I mean."

It was not quite all he meant. But how could he express his sense of her harebell frailty ; and his great desire—heritage of two thousand years and more years behind—to act the male, and protect her, and mightily build her round with protection that not a whistleful of cold air could pierce one chink of his protection on to one inch of her sensitive soul.

Nell loved Timothy. On the second of April (she remembered the day) he had kissed her slowly and reverently—and then suddenly, with queer eyes, and cherub's mouth grimly puckered and set, had strangled her body in his arms till she wondered. . . . Be sure a girl loves the boy in whose eyes she first sees that special queer look called up by her.

But Gillian still claimed her worship. Gillian she still idealized from footstool vantage. Gillian was a genius, and Gillian was brave, and Gillian had taken careless notice of her, and sometimes even been whimsically tender ; Gillian had never laughed at her—the least she could do in gratitude was to regulate her conduct by Gillian's ; to trust and follow her chosen pilot ; not let the sacrifice be in vain. . . . Why, supposing after Gillian had risked her very soul in daring initiative, all her disciples had scuttled backwards from her example . . . and . . . and got married ! Nell's face burnt with the shame of it ; she pressed her hot cheek down among the cool stems. . . . Funny, how enormous the thicket of buttercups looked above her, viewed right down here amongst their beginnings . . . flicker of green and shadow of gold and

minute fragments of notched fern and leaf, of weed and moss and wee scurrying insects . . . the polished petals bulged close to her eyelids, a bright blue beetle swung like a jewel from the tip of a blade of grass . . . below all this stir and hurry and colour—what else was there? Could she get deeper down into it? Deeper and deeper? If she lay quite, quite still, would the earth-life fold her up and cover her over with its smell and its hum . . . drowse—that was an earth-word. . . . Nell repeated it softly . . . "drowse . . . drowse . . ."

"Billy Dawson's number has gone up," Timothy's voice, startlingly near and loud, split the little circle of hush she had woven about her. "Saw it in the paper to-day. Poor old Billy—he was one of the best. Brought down three Boches first and then Archie got him. Rotten luck—I liked old Bill. This was his second time out there . . ."

And all not quite as irrelevant as it appeared. Timothy felt urgently the need of now or never making some special appeal to Nell, a thrust to penetrate all her spiritual mufflers. Because it so literally might be never—after to-day. But he could not say this—there was the bother of it! It simply wasn't done in the Flying Corps—of course not. But maybe if he just insinuated into her perception that airmen do occasionally get killed—other airmen—especially when for the second time out there—well, no harm in that, surely? Timothy, whose natural blunt honesty did not often lead him into strategy, now viewed himself as a very Machiavelli of subtle craft. He watched her closely for a wash of deeper colour in her neck and cheeks. But Nell rarely flushed . . . and he could not see her eyes . . .

A wind trembled over the top of the buttercups, swayed them from misty gold to a brilliant shining sea of light. . . .

"Oh!" and Nell sprang upright, "I want to get closer to them—oh, how does one get closer and *closer*. . . . I thought to lie in among them, but it doesn't help a bit. . . ." She began to gather up whole masses of buttercups, not picking each one singly from the stem, but tearing riotously, indiscriminately, an armful at a time, as though she were quenching a thirst. . . . Timothy, his gaze round with amazement, wondered what was the secret spring of this outburst of passion, venting itself on buttercups, millions of buttercups . . . already she had wrenched away more than she could carry; they tumbled from her fingers, and unheeding she stepped on

them and grasped for more . . . the long stems clung about her ankles—tripped her to her knees. Timothy leapt forward and clutched her as she fell against him—saw her and held her and kissed her through the sharp-edged little petals—brushed them impatiently away. . . . "Closer—and closer!" he sobbed—

"Tim—I oughtn't! We oughtn't! . . ."

"It's *right*—you said so. . . ." (Timothy had no idea he was being funny!)

The meadow, before these human babes stepped into it, was scooped with the rhythm of a perfect yellow bowl. But now the buttercups which had escaped the handling of Nell's fever-fury, stood away, aloof and delicate, from those other marred and trampled patches . . . buttercups wilting . . . buttercups dead.

CHAPTER II

I

"DEB?—oh, she'll be all right in December," said Mrs Phillips to Beatrice, and Beatrice to Trudchen Redbury, and Herbert and Abe to Samson, and Samson to Grandmother Phillips, and Grandmother Phillips to Flo and Martha and Gwendolen. "All right in December. . . ."

"Poor Deb!"

"I think Samson is simply too sweet with her. I've never seen anyone so devoted."

"Of course it's wonderful luck for Deb that he should be employed at the arsenal, so that he can get home every evening."

"I don't believe he's missed a single evening since they were married—how long is it now? Eight months."

"It's such a pity she wasn't well enough to come to Grandma's birthday party, I can't help thinking. You know, it's important for Samson—Grandma's so fond of him—always has been—the eldest . . . and Deb's rather extravagant. Well, of course, she's not used to managing yet—she does her best."

"I'm afraid you're right, Beattie. Because if she helped in the garden, the gardener twice a week would have been sufficient. But they have Mills on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. I asked him. And snipping off dead blooms is nothing really . . . if you care about flowers. My son's favourite hobby, too . . . one would have thought that Deb—of course, I'm always there to instruct her how I manage about my seeds, but—"

"Gwen and I have promised her to go in every morning for two hours' sewing. I still have the patterns we had for little Fanny's things. . . . Oh, she'll be all right in December!"

This was early June. . . . In December Samson's son was to be born. Samson's son—no misgiving in the minds of the Phillips that Deb might be just the sort of girl to present him with a daughter instead. . . . They trusted her to do her

best for the family. "I believe that trusting people is half the battle," said Beatrice brightly.

Samson had not yet recovered sufficiently from his bewilderment at the discovery that Deb was a liar but no sinner, to spread out the matter clearly in words before her, and ask for enlightenment. Instead, he brooded. . . . What could have been her possible object, wilfully to blacken her character in his sight? And at that crucial period of her life, too, while he was proposing to her?—"it might have put me right off. . . ."

The magnanimous husband was uneasy whenever he thought about it all. He felt like Falstaff among the lobs and gnomes on midsummer night; a sensation of trickery somewhere; somewhere, somebody laughing; an elusive tweak at his nose. . . . *Why* had Deb said: "I have not been good"? *Why*, as it was palpably not true? *Why* had she afterwards pleaded for his forgiveness? *Why* . . . Samson hated things he could not understand. He went about his home heavily, suspicious that at any instant another such perplexity might pop up to confront him. . . . He had taken Mab, Queen of the Pixies, for wife. . . .

They had settled down in Hampstead, to be near the rest of the family. He had asked his family to see a lot of Deb, adjudging their influence to be of solid benefit. His "little girl" would have no time to fret after her clever (and immoral) Bohemian friends, if she had always someone with whom to chat; she would probably take to Flo most—Flo was so lively! Really, almost a Bohemian herself (only moral).

And every night they all dined with Mrs Phillips and the Phillips' grandparents, or else with Hardy and Beatrice, or with Abe and Martha, or with Florence and Gwendolen, who were living together now their husbands were at the Front; or else Mrs Phillips and the Phillips' grandparents and Hardy and Beatrice and Abe and Martha and Florence and Gwendolen came to dine with Deb and Samson. . . . "We're a very united family, you know, Deb." . . .

Deb, as hostess, used to combat boredom by a sinister little game especially invented by herself for those occasions. She used to pretend that one dish of the meal—only one dish—was poisoned, by her express orders. It was quite amusing to note which members of the family would eat of it, and which would escape; and which only partially escape by helping themselves very moderately. . . . Curious that Abe, her special aversion,

by some twist of luck, *always* passed over whatever dish it was that Deb had fixed as lethal. . . . She realised that it would be hard indeed to kill Abe !

If the Phillips were being particularly exasperating, then Deb's fancy would carry on the drama through the subsequent stages of her sudden casual pronouncement of the impending doom : "I think it only right to tell you all—forgive me for interrupting you, Grandma—that the curry was poisoned, and you've none of you more than a quarter of an hour to live."

Oh, it was a childish game ! Deb, aged twenty-six, wife of Samson Phillips, prospective mother of a Phillips' heir, mistress of a fair-sized house and garden and two well-trained servants and the gardener three times a week, Deb, anchored in harbour at last, ought to have known better than to divert herself thus idiotically. But—those Phillipses !

It was not as though they disapproved of her. That would have been quite stimulating—to have been the object of violent disapproval, perpetual scoldings and perpetual defiance, hers the slightly supercilious attitude of the bomb which explodes sensationally in a cabbage field . . . after all, under such conditions, the bomb is the centre of attention !

But the Phillipses took it so heartily for granted that Deb was one of them ; that their cheerful intelligent interests were her interests ; their alert and wholesome outlook, her outlook. They were so unaware that other interests or outlook existed ; or, existing, that it could possibly claim a Phillips. For they had taken her to the Phillips' bosom—no, worse, they had absorbed her into the Phillips' bosom ; wrapt her densely round with warm affection and inquisitive solicitude ; what Deb did was right ; and if it were not quite right yet, that did not matter either, because Deb was doing her best. Inconceivable to them that she should not be doing her best, trying hard, where Samson and the family and the household and the future heir were concerned. Even as they would believe to the end of all time that chocolate pudding was her favourite pudding, so not a doubt existed but that Deb was all right—except when it was natural she should not be all right—and *that* would be all right in December. . . .

Therefore Deb poisoned them, one by one, and was not even sorry. It was a pity only that there was no one in whom to confide these illicit prancings of her imagination. Samson would certainly not have seen the joke. Besides, she was

rather afraid of Samson. He read the Faerie Queene aloud to her on Sunday afternoons, sitting in the garden, with a rug over her knees and cushions at her back; and sometimes he paused to interpret the more difficult parts of the allegory; and often, playfully, he called her Una—yes, he could do so now, because she *was* a pure girl, though he still did not understand why. . . .

There was compensation in her life when Ferdie came round towards six o'clock on dry evenings; exultantly dragged out the hose; and solemnly, but with a kind of red beam shining behind the solemnity, watered the two long flower-beds and the one short one which bounded their half-acre of garden; which was not at all unlike their old garden at Daisybanks, with its one shady tree over the tea-table, and the earwiggy arbour; only the Virginia creeper over the back of the house was lacking; the mat of dark polished ivy was not one-quarter as lovable as the clinging tendrils and late crimson she tenderly remembered.

"Richard is so happy nowadays," Ferdie would confide in his daughter, perhaps with a wistful plea for reassurance that he had not been the cause of Richard's year of wretchedness. "He reads of military history and air tactics all day long. . . . I believe he thinks himself already a captain in the R.F.C."

And this also was good to hear.

Of her previous gang of friends, Deb saw only Antonia. Cliffe was forbidden; Zoe—obviously one could never be quite sure what Zoe would say! Her blend of Palais Royale adventure and eighteenth-century interpretation thereof, was perilous, in the presence of Samson or Mrs Phillips or Martha.

And they had all heard of Gillian and her achievements in science, and had heard a vague report, too, that there was something "not quite nice" about her. Celebrities were often like that, of course, and one did not mind a bit; but then—one did not come in social contact with celebrities. They were both too good and not good enough for the Phillips' standard. Perhaps anyway for the moment it was better that little Deb—"What do you think, Samson?" "I don't want her to be lonely, but you see a lot of her, don't you, Beattie? you and the girls and mother? I don't want her to mope!"

"Oh, we'll see that Deb isn't much alone," promised Beattie, laughing; "I expect she'll almost wish us away sometimes. . . ."

La Ilorraine was an impossible visitor. Manon, on the other

hand, as Mrs Dolph Carew, was welcomed by the Phillips, who thought her " quite a sweet little thing " and admired her demure manners and prim foreign enunciation ; and chaffed her for her perfectly conventional point of view—for the Phillipses considered themselves too intelligent to be altogether conventional. *Morals* were different . . . morals could be taken for granted, like Deb's allegiance to the family, and Synagogues on Saturday, and clean white kid gloves, and a joint on Sundays, and England through thick and thin, and the windows always a little open in the children's nurseries, and other matters of unalterable standing.

Nell Redbury had entirely taken over Deb's canteen job, so she was seldom available for companionship. The other Redburys came and went, linked by Beatrice to the Phillipses ; Otto, still offended with Deb for her marriage, peevishly forbade Trudchen to instruct her in private succulent recipes for Samson's delectation. Hedda was not very interesting—perhaps because she tried so hard to be interesting. She pronounced " tempera*ment*" with a far-away look and an accent on the last syllable ; and lamented how wild and free a demi-maid she might have been had not Gustav Fürth unfortunately made her his wife before she had even time to get properly started. She capped conversation persistently with the two phrases " Je n'en vois pas la nécéssité," and " Ça n'empêche pas les sentiments," which really, uttered with the right air of esprit and diablerie, could be made to impart an indecent flavour to almost any subject. Hedda was . . . rather superfluous. It was not as though she were definitely musical, like David, or definitely beautiful, like young Nell ; or possessed the quaint wit of Hardy ; or the charm and vitality of Con. Deb did not care about Hedda. Deb was becoming desperate with boredom . . . her condition made boredom not lethargic but a restless agony ; the poisoning game had lost any power to relieve those long family dinners, and appeared merely futile ; the Phillipses were growing ever fonder and more fond of her. She felt her ego to be a tiny object lost inside an enormous parcel, to which everybody had wrapped round yet another layer, till the Phillipses had put on the final brown paper and string. And Samson abandoned the title of Una, and proudly took to calling her " little Mother." . . .

This was an inadequate excuse for her visit to Blair Stevenson's rooms. But . . . " He might have waited at

least another six months . . . till December. But I *know* they are all going to be facetious about that baby ! "

Her boredom was solely of the mind. Physically, she was feeling brilliantly well, abnormally vital. Her vitality was not allowed to be idle. . . . Samson, like so many rigid Puritans, was also a sensualist. And Deb, tired of the game itself reiterated, longed once more for the demi-game which was so much a play of the mind . . . a play of two minds ; entraining imagination and nimble fantasy and fear and danger . . . all the fine shades. Promiscuous adventure had become with her too much a habit to break off with one wrench. The first thought of Blair was an inevitable reaction from " being good." Inevitably, also, she englamoured her final experience before Samson acquired her as his legal possession, and forgot that Blair had not given great satisfaction, either, in the matter of . . . well, ecstasy. Remembered only that he was her kindred in mind ; that he had the light twist of humour she so missed ; the faculty to play ; and to play up . . . sometimes a visionist, sometimes a kindly cynic, always the man of deep and great experience . . . she was never dull with Blair. And if the missing thrill had been her fault, not his, then perhaps now she was married, things would be different. . . .

Anyway, she was only going to look at his rooms, from the outside . . . because he was still away, still in America. She was only going to steal from her cosy dug-out back again to No Man's Land, so that at dinner with the Phillipses to-morrow, she might console herself deliciously by the thought that she was a secret rebel to that irksome old Phillips' Illusion. Certainly Blair was still away, or—or Antonia would have mentioned it (would Antonia ?). So the expedition on to forbidden territory had the merit of being also perfectly safe.

And yet she might not have gone . . . had not general conditions grouped themselves in a way so absurdly conventional that she could not refuse to attend to her obvious stage directions. For duty obliged Samson to stay away for a night ; and this fact he paraded with so much pomp and formality and vexation, made such vigilant arrangements for the disposal of his little wife's loneliness, and reassured her so often as to his certain return the following night, that the comedy of the deceived husband suggested itself automatically—to anyone whose brain worked like Deb's. And then Abe rang up from a call-office to say that Martha (whom Samson's

care had ensured as a companion for Deb that night) had a bilious attack, and did not want to go out, and would Deb come to her instead, or should they let Florence know to go round ? Deb herself, being at that moment in the bath, did not answer the telephone, but received the information from a breathless housemaid, who thought the telephone " a nasty thing," liable at any moment to explode, so that she never listened long enough to receive and deliver a message as it was given. Deb did not bother to turn off the taps, but called back carelessly through the rush and splutter, that she'd expect Florence and would run round to see how Martha fared in the morning. She repeated this twice ; and turning off the water a moment later, heard afar off the voice of the housemaid explaining that Mrs Samson Phillips would go round to Mrs Abe Phillips, and expect to see Mrs Herbert Phillips in the morning. . . .

" Muddler ! " reflected Deb. And then she smiled . . . all the banal mechanism was so absurdly in her favour—husband away—a muddle on the telephone—suppose she assumed that her bath-water had run on a minute or two longer, swamping all sound, then she would apparently be justified in her late appearance at Martha's by an after explanation that she had remained at home waiting for Flo, according to arrangement. It seemed a pity to waste all this most excellent clockwork on an appointment with last year's shadows in Jermyn Street. But still, even Blair's wraith might be more amusing than a surfeit of Abe or Flo. . . . Deb never bothered to resist the guidance of external circumstances. . . .

Straight to Jermyn Street . . . the servants would believe she had gone round to Martha. . . . Then an hour later she would appear at Martha's, saying reproachfully that she had been waiting all the time for Flo. . . . Nobody would bother to verify the discrepancy in time ; the loss of an hour. . . .

So—straight to Jermyn Street . . . just for the fun of it ! Just for the fun of huddling herself in a disguising cloak, and once again creeping with awed feet along that silent, mysterious avenue where " men of the world " abode . . . for the fun of gazing wistfully up at the imperturbable stone frontage behind which playtime lay forgotten . . . for the fun of being once more in mischief, dreading discovery, thrilling at her own daring. . . . for the fun of flouting the Phillips' Illusion !

" He *is* still in America," for his windows showed sombre. But she remembered that in these days of air-raids, the erring

woman, creeping back to her past, could no longer expect to see the welcoming gleam from her lover's lamp—or candle—or electric light. . . . It was still possible that Blair was at home. . . .

But of course he was in America !

Crouching against the pillar at the foot of the steps, it struck her how in picture she resembled her private and particular horror as she had once described it to Gillian—the wanton always and inevitably " left," outcast in the rain and the cold, while inside husband and wife contentedly read aloud the Faerie Queene. . . .

" I only need the baby under my shawl. . . ."

And suddenly she flushed crimson, there to herself in the dusk ; and in secret shame sprang quickly to her feet, " I'm going home—to Flo, I mean—"

And banality, stage-manager till the end, at that moment smartly brought up Blair Stevenson to the foot of the steps ; and suggested he should switch on his torch to aid his search for the keyhole—the flare of light swept across Deb's face.

II

Deb arrived at Martha's, wondering if anyone so virtuous as herself had ever inhabited Hampstead or the universe. The scene with Blair had been a most astonishing one. Not only did he subtly convey to her his refusal to meet her on the old terms of play, but he rather more directly than usual put to her the choice of being extremely good or—or extremely bad. Blair—who of all men had seemed to acquiesce in the demi-game for the demi-maid ! Blair, who was practically the inventor of fine shades. . . . " Quite so, my dear—but now—" he lightly touched the wedding ring on her finger.

" Does *that* make a difference ? "

The slice from the cut loaf. . . .

Almost crude, from Blair !

" Don't look so taken aback, child. . . . Deb, what did you expect ? Come, let's talk it out, you and I."

So they sat on the narrow stone balcony jutting over the street —and side by side, without a touch between them, had talked . . . about touch, and about play, and marriage, and good old times, and loaves, and the demi-game, and the point of view of the man. . . .

"You can't go all the way, and then half way back, Deb. Nor will you find a partner to step that dance with you. Our old instinctive obeisance before the maiden doesn't hold good before the wife, so why should I—or any man—be content with half?"

"I thought you had enjoyed it . . ." whispered Deb.

"You were always . . . quite charming, dear. But—put it like this: supposing there had been no one else for me, during our friendship, do you think then, that our friendship as it was would have been enough?"

"For me!"

"For me?"

"Then there was—someone all the time?"

"Indeed there was . . ." his smile entered her into his confidence.

"I don't mind . . ." said Deb uncertainly.

"Of course you don't. But—now, there's no reason, is there, why you shouldn't be that somebody yourself?"

She shook a doubtful head.

"I love your mop of hair, Deb—I'm glad you cut it."

"I wanted to look like a boy—"

"You look the most girlish creature that ever plagued a man with promises."

She interrupted with a quick: "I never promised anything."

"Not with your mouth, Deb. Not with speech, rather. . . . How am I now to wind the thick black tresses round your throat, Deborah?"

"You'll have to abandon that pretty old-world pastime—" flippantly. "Or take the bell-rope."

"Will I have to abandon pastime altogether?"

"It's for you to say."

"For you to choose—all or nothing . . . dearest."

She said petulantly: "I didn't come here for these ponderous life-or-death choosings—I came for . . . for Japanese lanterns dancing in the tree-tops."

"That sort of thing. Yes—

> 'A tinkering with the lute of love
> By a nervous hand in a padded glove.'"

He broke off, shrugged his shoulders, gesture which conveyed without insult: "Ça ennui, à la fin. . . ."

Then still without touching her: "Well—is it to be the faithful wife?"

"I think so," said Deb, and added politely: "But thank you very much indeed for having been so kind to me in the past."

"—Or may I have the privilege of loving you as much as I have never dared to love you?" he continued, unheeding her reply.

Deb slowly turned her head to look at him. A very wan moon shivering through the darkness, helped her scrutiny. . . . She laughed softly: "You don't love me one bit, Blair. Nor are you likely to."

"If I told you how much," murmured the diplomat, "I should influence your choice unfairly."

"That's exactly what Samson said when he wouldn't take my hand before proposing to me. Oh dear—I suppose it will have to be Samson—and everlasting virtue—and dinner with my mother-in-law to-morrow. There is no choice, Blair—as things are . . ." and she sighed, thinking of December. "If it weren't for family claims, I might ask you to be godfather, Blair. . . ."

"I see."

Abruptly he stood up.

"If you don't intend to burn your boats—then it's too late and too dark for you to be sitting alone with me here. Run home, little mother—silly child, you need a lot of looking after, don't you?"

He thrust such whimsical tenderness into the inflexion "silly child" that she forgave him "little mother," as she would never forgive Samson. But she wished she had been the first to think of going home. . . .

"We part good friends, Deb?"

And she, demurely: "My At Home day is on second Sundays."

And they laughed into each other's eyes—excellent friends.

III

So perhaps for the first time in her life, Deb had definitely underlined a previous decision, instead of cancelling it. In marrying Samson, she was "being good"; in her refusal to

lapse from fidelity, she was still "being good" . . . Incredible! Her pleased and proud astonishment had hardly subsided, when her husband returned late the following afternoon.

"I rang up last night, trunk call, just to see if the little woman was all right without me," he remarked fondly, over the fish; "it was about nine o'clock, but the line must have been out of order—I couldn't get a reply."

"I daresay the line was all right, but cook was out, and I simply can't get Annie to realise that the 'phone isn't a wild beast. She was probably cowering under the kitchen table, while it rang."

"But you would have answered it if it had rung?"

"No—I was at Marty's."

"Not at nine o'clock. I dropped in just now to see Abe on business, and he said you didn't turn up till twenty-five minutes past ten, because of some mistake in a message. If you were at home and didn't hear the 'phone bell yourself, you shouldn't be so quick to blame Annie. I believe in being *just* with servants, Deb. Or—weren't you at home?"

She lost her bearings. "Oh . . . I don't know . . ."

The phrase irritated him—reminded him of a previous occasion when she had used it . . . a dialogue on their wedding night. . . . If Deb were altogether to be trusted . . . he was not the man to ask questions when once he trusted his wife. But Deb—Deb had not been like other girls. So Deb was not like other wives. And now, the minute he left her—

Stale type of suspicious husband, Samson glowered, pulled his moustache, meditated, decided to pass over the incident, changed his mind—and broke out:

"Look here, Deborah—I'm sick of all this shifting about. It all goes back further than last night. I'm going to get to the bottom of the matter. You've got to give me a plain answer to a plain question. Why did you tell me a year before I married you, that you weren't a good girl?"

Beat back through all that undergrowth? back and back—tangled motive, and reaction, and example, the example of Jenny Carew, once—but that was all over . . . a word read at a critical moment . . . moods, and the love of whirlwind disguises . . . mischief — boredom . . . Yes, yes, further back still . . . influence, of course—the influence of Cliffe Kennedy, of Gillian. . . . Well, but that was recent—and

behind that? The undergrowth thicker, thickening . . . her innate recoil from stinginess; the girl who will not give. . . . To and fro her mind rushed and stumbled with a snapping of twigs in the undergrowth . . . trying, obediently trying, to find out *why* had she told that silly senseless lie . . . the Phillips family—fear of being sucked into respectability—fear of the fate of the wanton—fear of wasting, of not being wanted. . . . Aunt Stella. . . . And the scene with Ferdie. . . . If they did not believe her good, she would at least be bad. . . . That look in Blair's eyes when he thought—no, that was afterwards. . . . Women, everywhere women . . . and chastity which was endless vigil. . . . Richard crying with his head in her lap. . . . So she married Samson, yes, and meant to be decent to him—if she could not be bad, she would as least be good—good—good. . . . So she married Samson, now confronting her in the attitude of fanatic orthodoxy, waiting to "get to the bottom of it"—of what? Of all her life, and the lives stretching behind her, and the Cosmos that had shaped her—the entire matted web of cause and effect? All this? How could she hope to drag his understanding in her wake? His understanding that was such a thoroughly awkward shape—unpliable, granite-hewn, rigid corners and lumps, bits of lichen in all the crannies. . . . Why, she could not even push through the labyrinth herself, with all her squirrel facility. . . .

"Give me plain answer—"

Plain answer? And suddenly Deb realised the impossibility of even trying; she was too weary; weary of muddle, weary of herself. There was no plain answer to anything—in her language; no answer that was not plain—in Samson's. So again she just said, replying to his question: "I—don't—know."

"But you must know."

"I mean—you wouldn't understand, even if I told you."

"There ought not to be anything to tell. A good wife has nothing to tell her husband. . . ."

Deb laughed ironically—"Well, and I've nothing to tell you, so it's all right."

"And we had such a jolly talk—and laughed—and sat side by side—and no harm at all," she whispered to her memory of the half-hour on the balcony with Blair. "And I meant to be so nice to Samson ever afterwards." . . . But how would

Samson interpret a confession that she had not heard him telephoning, because she was at that moment visiting Blair Stevenson? It would be rather fun to hear him thunder the inevitable accusations. And yet—and yet—Deb was conscious that she had rather outgrown this sort of cheap fun—outgrown masquerade—outgrown rebellion. She wanted her child, Samson's child, to be born in this harbourage of comfort and tenderness and soft wrappings and people to make things easy—yes, even the Phillips family. After all, it would be a Phillips' infant; and they were kind—always kind. She could not face the shawl-and-cold-stone-step business, with a baby to be born in December. Deb looked at Samson, her eyes very dark and grave. . . . Should she propitiate him? If this time—then for always. Can you do it, Deb? Kick away indecision and folly and petulance, little passions and the big passion? . . . "Suppose I went to Blair altogether, as he has asked me to come?" . . . And for the kiddie—what? No Man's Land again, a thousand times worse than her own experience of the between-region; the outer edge of things; no established identity. . . . What was the old game they used to play at Daisybanks? She and Richard and the Rothenburg children?—Touch Wood . . . Touch Wood . . . and (triumphantly) "*Home!*" . . . But oh, the awful dogged exhaustion of being chased without a blessed knowledge of "*home*" to be gained at a dash.

Deb made up her mind.

Then she crossed the room to her husband, and put both her arms round his neck—he was looking more than ever like Oliver Cromwell, with his features set into those harsh lines—and propitiated him. Whispered futile childish explanations of her conduct the night before . . . dawdling about in her room till late—*knew* she was naughty to dawdle—didn't care!—heard the 'phone bell and was too lazy to go down to answer it. . . . "Didn't know it was you, Samson . . . please! Thought it was Marty being cross at the other end 'cos I was keeping them all waiting . . . Sorry! very sorry . . . Oh, do pull out those furrows on each side of your mouth—one could grow potatoes in them. . . . Samson, don't you believe me?" Head snuggling and rubbing his cheek——

It was so much less bother this way—the way of least resistance. And anyhow, she had started all wrong, years ago, from the very beginning. Let others beat out the pioneer track—hers to make "home" for the little daughter. "Touch

Wood," "Touch Wood"—and already Samson was smiling at her, fondling her ear. . . . He did not quite believe her; he would recur to his suspicions later on; but for the moment Deb's sweet ways had placated him. He thought: "She is growing ever so much more tractable, with happiness. . . ."

CHAPTER III

I

"I've come to say good-bye," David Redbury explained jubilantly to La Ilorraine; "the Jewish regiment sails tomorrow, and I've dragged this fellow out to see me through my farewell visits," indicating Richard, who leant in the doorway of the drawing-room with "buck-up-and-get-it-over" expressed in every reluctant line of his figure.

"He's steadier than I am, you know, and one is liable to make such wild strange promises on these occasions. Supposing, for instance, Madame, that I were to send for you the minute the war is over, and I pitch my tent by the shores of Jordan . . . would you come?"

"I say to you, my dee-urr," and the prima-donna, in an incongruously correct sports-shirt, collar and tie, smiled whimsically over her owlish spectacles at his gallantry; "I say to you vot I zay to zat ozzer little fellow I see last night at the Tube corner—ah, he was a beauty, that one, with the skin of a peach . . . and he watch me a little, I, in my black gown and my black hat, very tall, very *femme du monde*—you see it? And he say to himself—'It is for the first time I adventure—perhaps one wiz experience?—I learn somsing—Better so. Vot should I with a pretty flapper, and she so innocent and I so ignorant—Awful! A desperate affair.' So I watch him make *that* reflection. And presently he move closer sideways, and he make his little proposition. . . . And I put my two hands on his shoulders, surprising him. And I say: 'My boy—you are moch too young—and I am moch too old . . . is it not so?'"

Her deep, hearty laugh rang infectiously. Even Richard joined in, and Manon, albeit not quite sure whether the mother of Mrs Dolph Carew ought not to recoil with more dignity from these trifling incidentals of dusk and Tube corners. As for David, he vowed she was adorable.

"Ah, but the Comtesse—there is one! Vonderful! You

vait and see her? Yes? She lonch with me to-day—her birthday. . . . I tell you, a great affair. We all lunch together? And you, who lof that Continent of ours, you shall eat——" She whispered to David, her arm encircling his khaki; his thin face vivid with appreciative reminiscence, as she reeled off the names of what Richard emphatically, but in silence, registered as "foreign muck."

The Comtesse arrived, and La llorraine, shedding all bourgeoise preoccupation with the menu, welcomed her as an exiled ambassadress welcomes exiled royalty.

The two ladies kissed a great many times, with rapid interchange of cheeks, and uttering short staccato exclamations; and then held each other a short way off for mutual and admiring survey.

The Comtesse was large, and wore a black picture hat on her crude vermilion chevelure; a mustard-coloured coat and skirt, and a pink ninon blouse crossed by a spray of limp cotton poppies that looked as though they had passed their lives pressed close to a stiff shirt-front. She exhausted so much space in her vicinity, magnetically as well as materially, that her fellow-beings were wont to move some distance away to avoid being absorbed by suction.

"My dee-urr," said La llorraine solemnly. "Never—never—never haf I seen you looking so well as in *that* blouse. . . ."

She introduced David and Richard with a great deal of ceremonial; and the Comtesse put her hand to her heart and gasped that they both reminded her of Antoine, *mon fils*. "That one, in particular," indicating David, "is his living image. I vow, he might be his brother."

"I rejoice that is not the case, Madame, since it would deny the possibility of any more gallant relationship between you and me."

"*Mon Dieu—quel garçon!*" the Comtesse delightedly flicked him across the cheek. And Richard marvelled at his friend's fluent impudence. But this was the atmosphere in which David revelled.

The company sat down to lunch, and La llorraine apologized with sad dignity for her so humble apartment and for inadequacy of service. Generously the Comtesse reassured her that where loyalty and ancient friendship existed, the third footman might quite well be lacking. Then reverting to the question of the blouse—

"I am broken-heart," the Comtesse announced dramatically; "I can wear it not. It is over—done—finish. Behold! I throw it away!"

"Tell me," La Ilorraine spoke in deep sympathy, but restraining the outflung hand from more positive operation in the direction of the ninon blouse—"what is it, then, has happened?"

"It shows the camisole—you see—it show it everywhere. Elsewhere but in this country what do I care? But my durrling, I have a lowndress"—and the Comtesse dropped her voice to a curdling whisper—"a lowndress?—*No.* She is a *vipère* . . ."

"Ha!" The other prima donna sprang to her feet, galvanized into opposition melodrama by the word "laundress"—"You say lowndress?—Look hee-urr!"—Oblivious of Manon, David, and Richard, she wrenched open her blouse, as Cleopatra might have done to reveal the bite of the asp. The Comtesse leant forward: "And look!" She was holding out her blouse tautly from her bosom, leaving a gap, down which La Ilorraine peered. . . . "Ah-h-h . . . yes, it is so . . . they are in a conspiracy—I say it! . . . they destroy—they have no reverence for lace—for embroidery—for the terruly artistic lingerie!—to zem it is all calico wiz—what is it the *jeune fille* wear in this England?—calico wiz *edging*—advertised 'durable!'" Scorn quivered to a climax, and slowly subdued; La Ilorraine and the Comtesse sank back into their separate chairs, and looked about them, gently smiling.

"This sauce is of an excellence," said the Comtesse.

"Oh, my dee-urr," La Ilorraine deprecated.

"My pauvre Antoine desires in his last letter to be remembered to you and to Mademoiselle votre fille," the Comtesse recollected, sinking into melancholy over the message to Manon; Antoine, it might be gleaned by the exchange of looks between the two elder ladies, cherished a hopeless but entirely respectful passion for the erstwhile *ingénue.* He was nineteen, decadent and penniless . . . nevertheless, La Ilorraine had long regarded him as a factor in her "plans" for the safe-bestowal of her daughter into matrimony; plans only relegated into hasty obscurity by Dolph's sudden accession to his uncle's wealth.

"I have brought his letter." His mother read aloud a few sentences that breathed such fervent affection for herself, and such rapt adoration for *la patrie,* that Richard turned crimson at the young Frenchman's lack of churlish restraint,

and David, catching sight of his agony, chuckled evilly. . . . "What's the matter, Marcus?"

Manon subtly gave the mother of Antoine to understand that she would not object at any opportunity that offered, to renew her acquaintance with the young man, from a purely matronly standpoint . . . "perhaps I may be of use to him. . . ."

The mother of Antoine, with equal subtlety, gave Manon to understand that the young man realized he would find her more accessible—and of more use to him—now than as a strictly chaperoned *ingénue*; and would therefore pay his respects to her on his very first leave, if, of course, agreeable to Monsieur Dolph Carew. . . .

And La llorraine twinklingly sanctioned this appointment. Had not Manon skilfully piloted herself into a marriage, at an early age? thereby proving herself far more discreet and competent than any of these English girls, sailing chartless through their late twenties. Manon could be trusted to handle such agreeable little interludes in matrimony as Antoine might provide. "It is only natural zat my child should now vant *that* good time," reflected La lloraine, in exact reversal of the argument of Ferdinand Marcus—but virtue before marriage, and a good time after, was Continental fashion.

A small joint of veal appeared on the table. Veal was scarce at this time, and the hostess received as no more than her due the anticipatory smiles of the Comtesse. "But what success," she murmured. The first slice was carved . . . and tragedy fell like a dark mantle upon the scene.

"It is almost raw," exclaimed Manon, shaping prevalent conviction at last into speech.

"I know it," said her mother in a tone ominously quiet.

"But what matter!" cried the Comtesse hectically.

La llorraine stood looking down upon the pink flesh among the gravy. She held the carvers in her hands, which suddenly she upraised in denunciation towards the ceiling.

"*That woman*! That char-r-r! I swear it—we part, she and I—but at once. In this house she shall not eat again. Heart-breaking; unthinkable. I have been good to her. . . . Ven her fourth durrty baby had ze pebbles—Bah, one does not speak of these trifles! I ask her in return: Prepare me this little loin of veal with care. Let it be just brown . . . with stuffing—so!—the stuffing I made with my own hands. My dee-urr, should I be ashamed of it! I who thought to make

you pleasure. . . . You who spoke to me of how difficult to buy veal. . . . Ah! I remember—and I bring it home zis morning, I smile, I am a little triumphant—why not? it is after all an occasion, that you come to eat here in my poor apartments—I desire to do you honour—And *that woman*—she spoil it all. She shall fly. Raw meat! My dee-urr, it is an insult to you, my guest. . . ."

The Comtesse strove to calm her, to rally her from ferocious gloom.

"Durr-ling, see—eet is not so bad. I eat some . . . wiz pleasure. True that I cannot bear the meat underdone, I shudder at it—but your thought of me was everything. It brings the tears. See, I eat some more of it. . . . We haf had to put up with moch, by this c-r-ruel war. Sit down then, chère llorraine, and to-day in a week you shall dejéuner with me in my little flat—my chef, Ludovici, shall be specially instructed—he fails me never, Ludovici—so devoted is he. *Chérie*, you should keep men, rather than these char-rr-women. I say it to you. It is shame to spoil good veal. . . . But," after a pause, and with forced sprightly enthusiasm, "how excellent are the potatoes!"

"It is from your noble heart that you speak," cried La llorraine. And embraced her friend.

II

"Aren't they luscious?" David chuckled, as he and Richard walked down Edgware Road.

"'Um. You like these rum people, don't you? It struck me the two old women kicked up a lot of silly fuss about the veal, that's all."

"And what sort of people does your Unappreciative Highness consider an improvement on La llorraine and the Comtesse?"

"The sensible sort—like the Dunnes. I'm going to stay with 'em next week. Grev's home, training for the R.N.A.S. And young Frank's just out of Osborne."

"Here—get on this Oxford Circus bus—I want to buy presents for everybody this afternoon, to love me by when I'm gone. You can help me choose—you have such taste and originality, dear Richard!"

"Feeling lively, aren't you?" grunted Richard, as they

climbed to the top of the bus. A shower of rain had washed the two rows of seats empty for them.

"So would you be, if you'd got rid of a nightmare like mine. . . ."

"'M yes—I know something about getting rid of nightmares." This was the black September of his eighteenth birthday, but Deb had saved him. . . . At any moment now, he might expect to hear from Samson that he was exempt from internment, and eligible to enlist. So Richard was in high spirits as well, though they did not leap and exult and fling themselves about and glitter into speech as uncontrollably as did David's. David was in quicksilver mood on the eve of his embarkation for Palestine.

"Just not to be ordered to kill Jews. Men with faces like mine, and exquisitely humorous noses like mine. . . . I used to lie awake and think of it . . . the rush into the opposite trench, and my rifle in the stomach of another Jew, tugging at it to get it out—get it out . . . while he looked at me—with my own eyes. . . . Well, thank God, I shall be spared that, at least!"

"I don't suppose they'd have massed all the German Jews there are, in the bit of trench opposite yours," Richard argued.

"One would have been enough, thanks," grimly. "I wouldn't have minded laying in among those swaggering Prussian crop-heads who have always shoved the Jews off the pavement . . . but it does make a difference in war *whom* one fights."

"Don't see it."

David laughed: "I might have known that even Richard the Second has his limitations!" and indeed Richard's later-born understanding of things below the surface had thickened somewhat again during his past year of reprieve.

The Conductor came round; and David said, "I'll stand the ice-cream if you'll stand the fares."

"Right. Lend me some coppers then, till I change a quid."

David had only half-a-crown, and the conductor handed Richard back two and fourpence. David eyed the coins mournfully. . . . "And *'e* didn't pay for ze tr-ram fares," he sang, in imitation of a music-hall Hebrew comedian. "I foresee much trouble hereafter over these reckonings. Look!" with a sudden wild lurch to starboard—"No—not there, you ass! Chalked on the pavement!"

"'British troops across the Jordan'—that's good going!"

"And he says 'that's good going!' He says it stolidly, as though it were British troops across the Regent's Canal—Man, man, where's your imagination? The names—the ancient names—don't they fire you at all? Jerusalem! Beersheba! Gaza! Mount Sinai! The Red Sea! . . . Why they're our history—*ours*. They call like trumpets. And to think I shall be out there among it all in a few weeks. Dealing blows for my own land! Richard, it—it drives me crazy. . . ."

David's eyes were a blaze of bright brown; his mouth trembled—"Doesn't it excite you that the Jews are going to win back the Holy Land for the Jews?—it *must* excite you," he pleaded.

"I didn't know you were a Zionist."

"I am—and this war ought to have made you a Zionist as well.—Come along, we get off at this corner.—Hasn't it proved incontestably that you've got to have some place to be patriotic about, if you're to be patriotic at all? The English have had one spasm of illumination by which they saw that; and so the Jewish regiment was formed, and so they're going to give us back Palestine, after the war. . . . Israel for the Israelites—and our gratitude to England. . . ." David leapt on to the pavement, walked along for a few moments in silence, and then said in his most matter-of-fact voice—"They shall learn that the Jew can give his pound of flesh as well as claim it."

"They want to get rid of you—and that's the whole spasm," Richard chaffed the enthusiastic young Zionist—"Fed up with the Chosen Race—too clever by half."

But David was in too radiant a humour to be baited. He merely declaimed in answer to the taunt:

> "A Prince without a sword,
> A Ruler without a Throne;
> Israel follows her quest.
> In every land a guest,
> Of many lands a lord,
> In no land King is he.
> But the fifth Great River keeps
> The secret of her deeps
> For Israel alone,
> As it was ordered to be. . . ."

"Not a gleam of response? Not one?" staring at his companion's impassive features. "That's Kipling, you know.

You ought to be chockful of him—Shall we have ice-cream sodas at Fuller's now, or shop first ? "

" Fuller's now," briefly emphatic. And they marched in.

" Yes, Kipling ought to be the god of your budding manliness : burly and brutal and blustering, and hit-the-bloody-nail-on-its-blasted head . . . all that. I expect you've got ' If ' pinned up over your washstand, haven't you ? "

" Not keen. (Raspberry, please . . .) Some poetry's not bad. I like Rupert Brooke."

" Not never you don't ? You *are* a little bundle of surprises. . . .

> " Here am I, sweating, sick and hot,
> And there the shadowed waters fresh
> Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.
> Temperamentvoll German Jews—
> Drink beer around."—

Yes, he's a poet right enough. How he makes one feel all his ache for the cool glimmer of an English stream—his loathing of fat bodies, and the wheezy moist voices and the sun flashing on the curve of their beaks ? "

" Can *you* understand that bit ? Good Lord, how funny ! Should have thought——"

" What ? " David's eyes, brimful of suppressed amusement, met Richard's over the rim of his glass.

" Should have thought it would have offended you. What the deuce are you laughing at now, Redbury ? I'm glad you don't sail for Palestine every to-morrow. . . . You're all over the place ; like Deb used to be before a party. Here—no—" as the bill was laid beside them ; " I want change for a pound to pay you back for the 'bus. You can square with me over this afterwards."

The change was brought ; eighteen shillings. Richard gave the waitress fourpence in coppers. . . . " Come along."

" That was *my* fourpence," said David. " You had no coppers in your pocket. It was over from the half-crown I lent you on the 'bus to stand me my fare. This is going to be a serious business in settling up, Marcus. It ought to be attended to at once."

" Quite simple ; if I borrowed half-a-crown, as you say——"

" If ? You did."

" And I pay your penny fare as well as my own, then I owe you two and fourpence——"

"No, you don't. You owe me two and six. No, two and eight. My own original half-crown and twopence for the fares."

"Why should I pay you twopence for the fares—you're not the bus conductor? Two-and-four I owe you. I can't give you the fourpence—I've just given it away, and I've no more small change. Here's two bob and I owe you fourpence."

"You're *all* wrong, my lad. Think you can teach a Jew? I'll argue my rights to the last halfpenny, if I have to take you along to Palestine to do it."

"Argue away," grinned Richard.

"You were to pay the bus fares, and I the ice-cream sodas. That was the bond. A confoundedly generous bond, considering you wolfed two, and they're eightpence now."

"The quantity was not nominated in the bond. Go on."

"If you pay the bus twopence, mine and yours, out of your *own* money, then it's palpably unjust to deduct it from the half-crown I lent you, and only pay me back two shillings and owe the fourpence. See that?"

"But you lent it to me to pay with." Richard did mistily perceive the point David was belabouring, but could not bother to focus it sharply.

"Only till you got some change of your own. You've got it now."

"Well, but . . . then *you* owe *me* for the ice-cream sodas, they were to be your affair."

"Granted. Two shillings, and subtract the twopence and the half-crown and fourpence for the waitress that you owe me—leaves——"

"Hi—hold on! We halve the waitress. Might as well do things properly now we're at it."

"Twopence for your share of the waitress; add that to *my* fourpence you gave her. . . ."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"That makes sixpence. We didn't give her sixpence. You're trying to swindle me, Redbury, because my wits are slower than yours . . ."

"When are the wits of the Gentile not slower than ours?" laughed David. "The Gentile must pay."

"Don't forget that this is only half a Gentile. Where were we? Let's begin all over again. You owe me two and twopence for ice-cream sodas and a bit of waitress: that clear?"

" Hang on to it. Then you owe me half-a-crown, and twopence for fares, and twopence for a bit of waitress, and fourpence more."

" It's that fourpence always cropping up. I don't see where it comes from."

" You took it from my half-crown to pay the waitress."

Richard looked so worried that David burst out laughing.

" ' Shylock, shall we have moneys ? ' Come on, don't give in ; this is rather sport."

" Sport ! . . . Look here, let's leave it all where it is, we're neither of us much out of pocket."

" Leave it all where it is ! " scornfully. " Small wonder the Hebrew wearieth of the slack and foolish stranger, and desires greatly a nation of his own kith and blood."

" You'll get jolly well fed up with your own kith and blood, when you can't cheat 'em like the slack and foolish stranger."

" We'll have to import a few of you for the express purpose."

It struck Richard that though David in this wrangle was calling attention to his own racial characteristic only to buffoon it, yet there was a sub-stratum of seriousness too, in his laughing persistence.

" I suggest," said David, " that as we are sadly incapable of adjusting the matter in our head—after eight years' public school instruction in higher mathematics—that we reconstruct as we go along, passing the money to and fro till we get it right. Now . . . we're on the bus again. You pay ! "

" Lend me half-a-crown," said Richard obediently.

" Give me back my half-crown to lend you, then."

" *That* didn't come in, on the 'bus."

" It's coming in now ! " David made a grab for Richard's pocket and extracted the coin. " There you are," giving it to him ; while Piccadilly looked on astonished, at the two youths absorbedly passing money to and fro as they strolled along the pavement. " Now you give it back to me unbroken and twopence for the fares . . . that's right, isn't it ? You *agreed* to pay the fares. And then we settle up my little debt."

Slowly Richard passed back the half-crown ; and two coppers. . . . Thought hard for a moment—then, with a yell, pounced on his companion, wrenched his fingers open, and extracted the pence. . . .

" Got it ! " he gasped. " So *that's* where you were cheating me, was it ? Well, I'm damned ! I pay for your fares, yes,

but I don't pay them *to* you, no. Or I'd be paying 'em twice over. *Got* you, David Redbury ! "

" Trustful little lad, aren't you ? " David mocked him delightedly. " How long did it take your homely wits ? Twenty minutes. And we're miles past the shop I wanted. Here's the two and twopence I owe you. ' La commedia è finita ! ' " he sang lustily in his beautiful tenor.

" Shut up ! Don't you see the sandwichmen are shying."

" I've got to get farewell presents for everybody, you included, Marcus. What would you like ? An Old Testament to revive your slothful patriotism for the tribes of Israel ?—Burst of gratitude ! In here, then." He dragged Richard into Hatchard's ; bought the Old Testament, and forthwith presented it to him ; chose also a richly-embossed W.B. Yeats for Nell ; and was with difficulty dissuaded from a selection of Carlyle's " Frederick the Great " as a tactful gift for his father. Then, in a different shop, he bought a rich piece of Chinese embroidery to form a window curtain for one of Beatrice's rooms, and a scarf for Hedda. Richard was amazed at his certainty of choice among the vivid colours and luxurious sheeny textures ; as well as his delight in them. His personality was as surely at home among the rich Oriental fabrics, as were Richard and the vendor obviously incidental.

" ' Not Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like unto these,' " murmured David, as the shopman departed with the bill and a five-pound note. " Ever heard the story of the kid in a Jewish school ? They read him that chapter, and then asked him : ' What did Solomon say when the Queen of Sheba tumbled down her treasures before him ? ' ' Pleath, teacher—he thed : ' Vot do you vant for de lot ? ' "

No one could tell a Jewish story with such perfect inflexion and gesture and look, as David ; and Richard's appreciation echoed through the department.

" Do you think I might offer the Comtesse a little tribute in vermilion, to match her hair ? She had glorious hair, that woman. In two long plaits and a pitcher balanced on her head. . . . I shall probably send for her when I'm established out there—the time will come when I shall long for the relief of a snub profile to gaze at, as Rupert Brooke longed for Grantchester. She shall be a wife to me——"

" A wife ? "

" *The* wife shall be Rachel, and her hair will be dusky, not

vermilion ; and her throat golden-brown. And she shall walk on the gold-brown sand so that the pitcher of water be not spilt of a single drop. You know, Richard, most of our lady friends in Hampstead and Maida Vale and Bayswater have grown waddlesome with generations of menials to attend them, so that they'll have to practise an awful lot with a sort of wire-frame arrangement on their heads, before they can balance their pitchers properly."

" Don't believe they'll come at all. A lot of Zionists I've heard of are in a blue funk that they'll be grabbed against their will and carried kicking aboard the Good Ship Jerusalem."

" Set upon by a press-gang, and made to fag for us ; for me, David, King of Zion——"

" King, eh ? You're going it ! "

" You shall come and be my Grand Vizier, O Richard."

" That's the Arabian Nights. Getting mixed, aren't you ? "

" The deadly habit of accuracy is notably confined to the unimaginative."

Richard grunted.

" With you beside me is like taking a stroll with a portable farmyard."

" You haven't bought anything for your mother yet."

" I must get some large-sized silver frames. I was photographed to surprise her about a month ago—they've turned out rather well. Beastly nuisance—but she fretted so, having none of Con. He never *would* let himself be taken. . . . So she shall have me in half a dozen different positions, bless her, just in case—not that she'll care about the whole lot like the one rotten little snapshot of Con that she's always poring over . . . but still. . . ."

His exuberance was for a moment dulled.

" She's having such a rotten time. The Guv'nor has put his foot down over any more correspondence with Aunt Anna, this last year—just as if it would affect nations if two sisters wrote their pathetic loving little letters to tell each other of their sons killed and the hardship of getting good servants nowadays. . . . But the black curtain is down between Hampstead and Berlin now—and Mum's wondering always what is going on behind it." He was silent a moment, then burst out indignantly, " What harm can he possibly suppose it would do——" and left the sentence unfinished. But Richard, under " he " was flashed

a complete picture of Otto, very bilious, very Jingo, in the art of disciplining Trudchen. . . .

"People are queer nowadays . . ." was all he found to say.

"Queer the other way round, too," David said thoughtfully. "Would any country in all the world but England ensure that her prisoners of war be fed on the fat of the land, while her own people want? It's a sort of splendid crack-brained chivalry—The German fellows don't understand it; makes 'em laugh. It *is* highly comic when you come to think of it. . . . 'For Allah created the English mad, the maddest of all mankind!'"

"It's the old-established tradition of chivalry still upheld by officialdom. I doubt if it's in the blood of the people any more; they grumble about it—call it treachery, not chivalry."

"Those are only the people left over, not the fighters. One learns bad habits if one is left over. . . . I'm glad we're both for the thick of it now, Richard."

"Yes. . . ."

"Is it all right for you? I mean, you're sure——"

"Phillips promised. I haven't heard yet. . . ." But he was so sure that he said quickly: "Of course I may be let down any moment, in fact, I suppose I've no earthly chance——"

David smiled at the unconsciously Jewish trait revealed in the semi-Jew: the instinct that is afraid to trust its own luck—aloud; instinct that has learnt to fear the duration of good luck, and thinks to propitiate Jehovah by an affectation of incredulity. David himself had behaved in this fashion since his earliest babyhood. Victims of persecution—was it persecution or justice now meted out to Richard and his like?—children of No Man's Land. . . . "Persecution is for *being* something wrong; justice for *doing* something wrong," came to David in a flash of insight. Nobody could help *being*—all down the ages . . . Jews—niggers,—slaves—Huguenots—early Christians—Saxon serfs. . . .

"I'm going to take a taxi home; these parcels are too much for me. You go quite a different way, don't you?"

"Yes. G'bye."

Richard turned quickly and walked away in the direction of Hyde Park Corner. He was suddenly aware of David as a very complete element in his life; and David was now withdrawn, perhaps for ever, in all his lithe embodiments of radiance and melancholy, of profound thought and mischievous ragging; David suffering in front of the camera because he

understood how his mother fretted for a likeness of Con ; David reeling out names off the map of Palestine in drunken ecstasy at their associations ; David savagely ironic over his father's Jingo attitude ; David playing the fool over twopence in the middle of Piccadilly. . . . Richard wished he could have been called up at the same time as David, and thus have slurred over the present acute sense of loneliness. . . . " I'm glad we're both for the thick of it now, Richard "—and David would understand why he had not lingered over leave-taking. David could be relied upon to understand—always.

He found a letter from his brother-in-law, Samson Phillips, awaiting him at Montagu Hall. It related briefly that Sir Ephraim Phillips had done his utmost in the matter of exemption from internment in Richard's case ; but in view of the fact that he was German-born, with father not at that period naturalized, could do no more than procure the alternative that he should be called up to serve in the Labour Battalion——

" No, by God ! "

Richard crumpled up the sheet in his hands, and flung it violently against the wall. The Labour Battalion ! Soldiers who were not allowed to carry weapons ? Soldiers who were sent to the Front and not permitted to fight ? The compromise was ignominious. . . . And David had said : " I'm glad we're both for the thick of it, now, Richard . . ."

It was all right for David, wholly a Jew. " I'm not going to be half a soldier," muttered Richard. Rather internment than be tantalized by the wear of khaki, maddened by audible gun-thunder. Rather internment than that—and in a fortnight he would be eighteen.

CHAPTER IV

I

—"And would it be indelicate to ask," said Gillian, "*why* I'm suddenly invited to take tea with you, on these lawns of sheer respectability? I'm touched, Deb, really I am; I even left some jolly little fellows from the trenches to look after themselves, while I toddled off here; and I bought a new hat on the way—d'you like it?"

"It's a monstrosity," Deb replied frankly. "Take it off at once, somebody might see you in it; that's better. Why didn't you bring your wounded soldiers?"

Gillian looked puzzled, and Antonia explained laughing: "The jolly little fellows from the trenches are not what you think, Deb; and I doubt if your in-laws would approve of their presence here at tea—it's enough for a start, that you should be allowed to invite Gillian, without a cortège of bacillian satellites. How was she finally admitted? I'm curious, too."

"My husband met an eminent titled specialist, who happened to mention that a pamphlet with a perfectly ghastly name, published last month by one Gillian Sherwood, revealed one of the most brilliant pieces of research of modern times; and that the whole medical and scientific world were in a state of thrilled awe—that true, Gillian?"

"I believe so," modestly. "But it's nice of your husband to overlook my little aside from virtue, Deb."

"He didn't exactly overlook it, you know. Samson doesn't possess the art of overlooking. He walked all round it, breathing hard, for nearly a year; and then hung a label on it: '*Eccentricity of Genius.* Not to be confounded with *Fallen Woman.* So please don't spit!'"

"Ass!" chuckled Gillian.

"Lest you should grow proud, I may mention that Mrs Dolph Carew, likewise invited to tea this afternoon, has been and gone, that she might not have to meet you, Jill. I gather

that she's having a demure affair on the Q.T. with a certain Count Antoine . . . but some women flaunt their affairs so shamelessly in the face of the world, that r-r-really, my dee-urr, one can't possibly be associated with them. One is shocked, sorry—so ter-r-ribly sorry . . . but the good Mrs Dolph Carew comes to tea early with the good Mrs Samson Phillips—oh, but very early——"

"I'm *not* having an 'affaire,'" protested Gillian. "Does that little careful beast Manon imagine that I'm a cheap French novel? Deb, Deb *darling*, did you tell her that a multitude of hoary professors are always to be found squatting at my feet?"

"Yes. 'We are not impressed.' . . . Hoary professors aren't *Society*, after all."

Antonia meditated: "We might put Cliffe on to the story of the French Count——"

"Too busy with Winnie to understudy the God of Vengeance just at present."

"*Winnie*?"

"*Cliffe*?"

Gillian nodded. "'M. Last night. Quaint, isn't it? You know, she always had a queer fascination for him . . . she was so placid and plump—and he so gaunt and impetuous . . . he used to try and try and *try* to rouse her to some display of emotion, till he went gibbering mad with failure . . . and she just lay on the sofa. I used to watch them. So at last, in a sort of frenzy, he proposed to marry her—and she really *was* surprised. Rather surprised, not awfully. She said: 'Fancy. Did you ever. What things you do say, Cliffe!'" Gillian mimicked the slow, fat speech of Winifred with a fidelity that stirred both her companions to mirth . . . though Antonia was very white; and Deb's lips were ruefully curved: If Cliffe were at all inclined to marry . . . "then why not me—at the time?" half laughing, yet wondering a little how Winifred Potter had succeeded with Cliffe where all the rest of them had failed, and separately summed him up as sexless—dear old Cliffe—the Uncle type—a flying comet through their lives. —"And he's exuberantly, fantastically happy in his choice," Gillian added, innocent of sub-currents; "so am I and Theo—No—so *are* I and Theo. . . . That doesn't sound right either, does it? Theo did all the flirting he could with her, in about a couple of hours . . . So far and no further, you remember?—and then it bored him to have her always about the home. And

it made a lot of extra work for me—I'm not complaining—but just mentioning it, now it's over. Of course we couldn't turn her out, but we're speeding up the nuptials with enthusiasm. And then we two shall be alone together . . ." softly. And no one, seeing her eyes and her mouth, could have doubted the success of her pioneer experiment with the audacious but unworthy Greek.

"Does Zoe know?"

"About Cliffe and Winnie? I don't think so. I expected she'd be here this afternoon."

"No, she's indispensable to the War Office on Monday afternoons—not a couple of loafers like you—you're lucky in your Major-General, Antonia, he *always* seems to be having bilious attacks!—I received a very Zoe-esque letter, hinting at a fruitful episode in a cinema, where she carelessly put her foot up on the seat in front of her and accidentally left it there even when someone sat down, and it came back with a note inside—the shoe, I mean—saying he was *follement éperdu* of the pretty ankle, and would the owner meet him, etc."

"A typical Zoe adventure, French and all. 'Men may come and men may go,' but there will always be enough for our Zoe! even nowadays."

"After all, she only needs as many as there are doors to her flat, and one over. What is it, Antonia?"

Antonia said, "There's young Nell—and she looks . . . queer."

II

Nell Redbury walked slowly across the lawn towards the tea-table under the yellowing chestnut tree. Arrived there, she stood, mutely awaiting interrogation; her gaze full on Gillian. . . . Nobody spoke; the three elder girls felt as though nipped and held in the pincers of tragedy, and each one was afraid. . . .

"I'm going to have a baby," said Nell at last, in the stupid voice of a child repeating a lesson she has not quite understood. "The doctor said so. Mums cried. And father said I was not to come home any more."

"Is that all!" Gillian almost laughed in her relief. "Oh, you lucky little devil—no, I don't mean that—you're only

a kid still yourself, and it's rather rough luck, but still—Who and where's the infant husband? I suppose it's Timothy?"

"Yes," Nell answered gravely, but still standing a little aloof from the tea-table. "But he's not my husband. We—I—thought you would be pleased."

"Because I did it myself?" Her goddess became suddenly stern.

"Yes." And once more the refrain, "I thought you would be pleased. You said . . . you all said. . . . I've forgotten what you said," with sudden droop to weariness.

"Whatever I said and whatever I did, wasn't for a baby like you," Gillian brutally informed her, in a double effort to vitalize the girl's apathy and to knock her own conscience insensible. "I may have said that where marriage is impossible, it's better to do the other thing than to brood and mope . . . but in your case marriage *is* possible; possible and natural and inevitable. Especially now. . . . There's no earthly or heavenly reason, young Nell, why you and Timothy should put yourselves to the inconvenience of being not married, and you're jolly well going to be shoved through the ceremony the very first moment he can wangle leave and come back."

"Yes," Nell acquiesced again. And, after a pause: "But he won't come back. It was in the paper to-day. . . . They've killed him."

She still stood a little way off from the group at the tea-table, staring with mournful enquiry at Gillian, who had broken down in a fit of wild sobbing. Then, lest she had not been understood, she repeated: "The doctor says I'm going to have a baby. And Mums cried. And father said——"

"You needn't go home, my dear, my dear. . . . You're coming to my home with me. It's all right—nothing to be frightened of—I'm going to look after you . . . yes, both of you——" It was Antonia who swept to Nell's side by an irresistible impulse, had gathered her strongly in her arms, and faced round on the other two with a look that challenged while it scorched.

"You're neither of you going to meddle any more where Nell is concerned—haven't you done enough harm? with your talk and your example and rubbish?—No one's business but your own what you do with your life, is it, Gillian?—is it?

I knew somebody would have to suffer—ancient law—on those who break the laws—and you go scot free, and this poor kiddie. . . . Oh, *damn* your splendid freedom, and your new era, and your mix-up and mess-up of everything that's clear and right—time-tested. Progress—is *this* your statue of progress?" She pointed to Nell Redbury, now crumpled forlornly against the older girl's tense erect body. . . .

"No use ranting at me, Antonia; I'm terribly responsible in this case," Gillian acknowledged. "And of course it's my business, not yours, to take Nell home and look after her——"

"With Theo about the place?"

Gillian was silent. And Deb interposed: "She's better with Antonia, Jill. *I* can't give her shelter, worse luck——" Samson, she knew, would show no mercy in this crisis.

Gillian said softly, "If Theo can help. . . ." She found it difficult to put into words her conviction that Nell was only eighteen, and it might be warmth to her frozen emotions to have it conveyed—even by Theo Pandos—that men were still in the world and still desiring her . . . a wintry gleam of promise for the future.

But it was heartless to translate her meaning in front of Nell, whose chubby serious young lover was only just dead. . . . And Antonia's wrath swept out again like a banner in the wind:

"Theo—*help*? isn't he as promiscuous as the rest of you—as Deb, as Cliffe . . . with your love-making all over the place . . . sex discussed just for the fun of it. . . . Deb prattling about the waste of her young limbs—we haven't forgotten that talk, Nell and I. . . . Nell hasn't forgotten it to some purpose. . . . Let's all live our own lives—let's all live somebody else's. . . . Well, it's been a merry puddle-party while it lasted! Come on, Nell," her voice sank to inexpressible tenderness. Without a backward glance, she supported the quivering, clinging form of the younger girl across the lawn and through the garden gate. "Taxi!" they heard her clear call. And the responding grate of wheels against the kerb.

Their departure was one little aspect of the war: woman perforce dependent upon the manlier woman . . . while out in France the fatal shrapnel bullets ripped through the staggering 'planes. . . .

III

"Deb," Gillian lifted an appalled white face from burial in her palms; "Deb, she's right. Antonia's right. I'm to blame for this little tragedy."

"So am I. We all talked—and forgot that Nell listened and did not quite understand."

"I did more than talk . . . with the result that Nell is to have the baby I wanted and denied myself. . . . It seems that I couldn't save that poor little love-child from birth, after all! But surely I *must* have had the sense to say there should be above all a case and a reason before girls chucked marriage to the winds. . . . What possible reason could those children have had to play the fool?"

"The individual exception is beyond Nell. What you did was good—to her. She took the example and grafted it promiscuously."

"Antonia called us all fatally promiscuous . . . but Antonia——" Gillian hesitated. "Artemis on the turn," she remarked presently. "Deb—there's a time when virginity inevitably becomes spinsterhood. It's rather a dangerous time. . . . Antonia has kept fiercely pure——"

"Out of a sort of protest to us. . . ."

"Perhaps."

"What a muddle we're in, Jill, every one of us, since we've left the old track——"

"We're beating onwards into the open, no doubt of it. But the transition period can't be skipped, like a dull bit of history. There's bound to be a generation of martyrs between the old and the new. In whatever context of development. Education—and sex—and religion—and nationality——" she debated silently for a pause of time. "Yes—it fits in each case. . . ."

Nationality. . . . Deb's thoughts flew to her brother. She was anxious, not having heard from him or seen him since Samson had written that letter suggesting the compromise of the Labour Battalion, more than a fortnight ago. And to-morrow was Richard's eighteenth birthday. . . .

"It will be all right for the next generation. Our lot are not sure yet—stumble forwards and backwards in the twilight—let go of established tradition before they've grasped

at an equivalent to support them. And some of us must be sacrificed down the wrong paths to prove them wrong. . . ."

"Not my child, anyway," Deb cried with sudden vehemence. "*She* shan't be a victim to neither-nor. One of us is enough."

"You'll bring her up in the old way?"

"As strictly as I can, right and wrong, good and bad . . . signposts wherever she may stop and wonder. I'm going to superintend her morals; I'm going to say 'don't,' and I'm going to ask questions, and forbid her things. And be shocked whenever it's necessary I should be shocked——"

"You little reactionary!"

"Yes . . . I know. Don't mistake me, Gillian—I believe it best to be first thoughtful and then courageous—as you've been. But my daughter Naomi—I'm quite sure it is to be a daughter—will be partly a Phillips; handicapped from the start. Samson is at least a generation behind even the transition period. He's almost extinct. And he'll be her father."

"Meaning that if you marry the jailer of a prison, it saves trouble to bring up the child as a convict?"

"If Naomi rebels, she'll be up against it. . . . I want her to be happy. Oh, I couldn't bear to see her muddling and experimenting as I've muddled and experimented; a failure as I've failed. She must learn to please the Phillips family, and conform to Phillips' standards. For her, there's only happiness in conformity."

"And for you?"

"Yes—and for me. That's partly racial, you know. The Jewish girl isn't meant to be a pioneer of freedom."

"Nell——"

"Nell, I honestly do believe for your greater rest to-night, Gillian, would have succumbed anyhow. She's really deep down passionate—not only a surface affair. . . . I say, isn't it curious how we've always deplored the waste of Charlotte Verity's fanatical tolerance on Antonia who doesn't need it?—It fits in splendidly now for Nell. She'll make a heroine of Nell, and simply love having her there."

"The pattern preconceived . . ." Gillian murmured. "Then was it also decreed since the first evolution from chaos, O Deborah, that you should fit into the Phillips' scheme at last?"

"It seems like it," not altogether ruefully. "When I tried to play the old game, just once, just for fun, it politely informed

me that it had no further use for my services," and on an impulse she confided in Gillian her expedition to Jermyn Street, three months ago.

"Blair—behaved quite well," was Gillian's sole comment.

"Oh yes. Blair is a man of experience. There's a mellowness about him—Had it been a chivalrous hot-headed young knight to whom I had flown in distressed rebellion, he would have urged me to abandon my home and husband, and trust my future to him—and we'd have been unhappy ever after."

"Is Samson still suspicious?"

"Yes—up till the hour of going to press; on and off. But I can counter it."

"With what do you counter it?"

"Fascination," admitted Deb simply.

Gillian laughed, but would not explain her laughter. From the tone in which Deb had said, "I can counter it," it was delightfully evident that Samson was providing his wife with a new game, the game of re-conquest. . . . "It keeps the child occupied and amused," reflected Gillian; "and of course she'll coax down his suspicions in the end, especially——"

"It'll be all right in December," she prophesied to Deb, who in her turn gurgled mirthfully and refused to say why.

"'The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady
Are sisters under their skins.'"

—you representing Judy in this instance, with the entire bulk of the Phillips' Illusion in the rôle of the Colonel's lady."

"Define the Phillips' Illusion. It crops up in your conversation like King Charles' head."

"The Illusion is that any girl would love Samson; that I love Samson; that I am happy; that I am doing my best to make Samson happy; that we are all happy together; that we are a united family. Amen. In the end the Illusion will become fact. It will overpower me . . . it's already much stronger than I am."

"You're by nature—adaptable, aren't you, Deb?!"

"Horribly so . . . yes, and that fits in, too, Jill, for if I'd been very emphatically myself, all cornery and defiant, I'd have rebelled and gone on rebelling and urged Naomi to rebel . . . and we'd have been uncomfortable for the rest of our lives. But for me as I am—the most pliable, accommodating, imitative

creature on earth—I do see, oh, . . . tolerable comfort and resignation ahead."

"Intolerable discomfort and rebellion are better things for the soul, Deb. They stimulate it."

But Deb only said: "The Phillips' Illusion is too much for me. . . ."

CHAPTER V

I

All this year of hope and reprieve, Richard had just dimly realized the continuation of Mr Gryce's attacks ; but they had slithered more or less harmlessly off the conviction that in the September of 1917 would come his own chance to prove to Englishmen whether or no he be an Englishman. Now . . . Mr Gryce had not improved with keeping ; and Richard was again exposed, without shield, to the old pestered agony of responsibility . . . *he* had committed atrocities ; *he* did not fight fairly ; *he* was a German, the Germans. . . . No place for him during the war—no place afterwards. Where was he born ? Where reared ? where legally belonging ? Where his sympathies ? . . . All over the place—nowhere—anywhere. What country wanted him ? What country claimed him ? For what country and in what cause had he suffered during the Great War ?—Jew, then, at least ? Or Socialist—Conscientious Objector ?

But he had no convictions—doubting even his own stubborn loyalty of schoolboyhood. He was no more a schoolboy. He was a man—a man with nerves. His nerves gave Richard no rest.

He did not regret, in the week that followed Samson's letter, his refusal to serve in the Labour Battalion. Morally, he considered the evasion despicable—for him ; though a good enough solution for those who really were indifferent for the fight, and impartial as to the issues. He did not regret it ; nevertheless, his loathing towards internment swelled again to a morbid obsession. He positively could not bear the sound or sight of the word. And then Mr Gryce began to flaunt a button with " Intern them all " displayed thereon—Richard went down to stay with the Dunnes for his last week of liberty. He remembered affectionately and with a sense of far-off coolness and repose, that chintz sitting-room in the cottage ; its

portrait of Commander Antony Dunne over the mantelpiece ; its atmosphere so casually, indubitably English ; remembered too how naturally in those Christmas holidays of 1914 he had fitted himself into this room and what it stood for. Perhaps here was peace from the demons plaguing him ; reassurance, also, as to where in spirit he belonged. If he were " all right " among the Dunnes, he was—all right.

The chintz sitting-room, speaking for the Dunnes, repudiated Richard Marcus ; bluff and careless Antony Dunne was definitely antagonistic towards him—and Antony Dunne dominated his family still, from the encircling oak frame. Richard had anticipated gratefully the room, the pictures, the model of a man-of-war, the curios from the Pacific Islands and Japan aod the Malay ; the albums with Greville and Frank in their different stages of allegiance to naval tradition, the battered boys' books on the shelf, all yarning about the sea and sea-fights and sea-heroes ; the view of low-lying fields beyond the windows ; he had anticipated all these—and forgotten he was no longer careless participant. The room informed him now very definitely that he was an outsider ; guilty in his birth-place ; the room quietly but grimly imposed its personality upon Richard, as symbolizing all from which he was excluded. The Dunnes had lived in Essex, in Market Cottage, since five generations ; the Dunnes had always been naval stock—dedicated to England's sea-service long before any question of war ; their patriotic allegiance need not even be mentioned—could be taken absolutely for granted ; it stood—as this room stood. That the Dunnes should ever go messing about the Continent and having their sons in the wrong places . . . the room was lazily scornful at the mere idea. The Dunnes were quite, quite certain beforehand where they were to be born and where buried. One of them had settled in another county, and one—Molly's father—had married a London girl ; these were their utmost excursions abroad. And one Dunne had learnt how to speak a foreign language, Spanish, fluently . . . it was a great joke among the other Dunnes. And when their profession took them across wide seas and into strange ports and islands, these seas and ports and islands became, at a touch, English . . . or English to them, which was the same thing. They were simply uninfluenced by what was not English ; just as the room absorbed no outlandish flavour from the scattered lumps of stone and

coral, weapons and embroideries. These were vivid and interesting enough—but only vivid and interesting on sufferance ; the real thing was the chintz, the view, the album.

Richard grew to hate that room.

Next, he grew to hate Frank. Frank was a talkative lad of fourteen, who had met Richard with the pony-trap on arrival at the station of the nearest town ; it was necessary, before driving out to Market Cottage, four miles away, that Richard should call at the police-station, and exhibit his papers and photograph and so forth ; and answer the official's searching questions. Frank's curiosity had insisted on accompanying Richard inside, even to the lengths of bestowing pennies on an urchin to hold the pony ; he thought the whole proceedings "rum" ; no previous guest of the Dunnes had ever been subjected to all this fuss. . . . Frank asked the object of the fuss a great many questions about registration—recurred to it all through supper, in fact : "Five-mile limit—what does that mean ? That you can't go any further from here without special permit ? Good Lord ! Grev, did you hear that ? Then you can't come with us to the meet on Thursday. What rot for you ! don't you hate it ! I say, show the Mater your photograph, won't you ?—the one you showed up at the Station. I suppose they think you're a spy ! Do you have to exhibit your thumb-prints too ? Like a bally old convict, isn't it ? . . ."

Richard could not bring himself to be chatty or informative on the subject of registration ; and Frank, incensed by his surliness, came to the conclusion that Richard was a spy, and as such ought to be tabooed from intimacy, and watched.

The situation worried Greville, the more so as he could not quite whole-heartedly champion Richard—"You see, Mater, he's not a bit like he used to be. I mean, he was quite a jolly old bean last time he was here, wasn't he ? But now—he goes red as fire when Frank rags him about the police and so on——"

"We must just tell Frank to leave off, if it makes Richard uncomfortable. He's our guest, after all."

"Yes—but Mater—if—if——"

"What, dear ? "

"If Richard felt as—as loyal—well, as other chaps, he'd laugh, wouldn't he, when Frank . . ." The handsome young naval sub-lieutenant was no psychologist. "You don't sup-

pose there's anything in it, do you, Mater? I'd never have dreamt of such a thing if Richard hadn't changed so from when he was at Winborough. And Frank is always going on at this child for chumming up with a German. I punch his head, of course, pretty often; but *why* does he shy like an old cart-horse when we talk about the war? Richard, I mean?"

Mrs Dunne smiled: "I don't think Richard is a spy in the German pay, Grev, if that's what is on your mind."

"Oh, nor do I," very quickly.

His mother waited; there were obviously more skeins of perplexity to be unwound.

"One doesn't have anything to do with a German," Greville blurted out. "But what's one to do if he's your pal beforehand?"

"I wonder. . . ." Mrs Dunne thought it out, though hardly realizing that this was the predicament of a great many of her fellow English.

Greville was not the type of boy who would ever of his own volition commit any act that was in the least degree complex or eccentric. Richard had been as normal and sturdy a disciple of take-it-for-granted as himself, when they had first paired off as inseparables. So that the shatterment of Richard's normal world, of necessity involved a twitch where it joined Greville's.

"I think you owe something to old friendship, my boy."

"Oh, this child isn't going to be a perishing deserter, betcher-life. . . ." In proof of which, Greville summoned Richard for a long tramp through the slowly russeting country. They swung along for the most part in silence, as they had always been wont to do; but previously it was the silence which signified "all's well," whereas now it was lumpish—a case of nothing to say. For Greville's natural disposition was for anecdotes of the gunroom—joyous narrative of the day when they "bagged a Fritz," or technical details of his present training for the R.N.A.S.—his companion's set face and monosyllabic appreciation was discouraging on such themes. Even had Greville realized that the other was sick with envy, and not, as he thought, bored, it would hardly have rendered matters more comfortable. Mutual memories of Winborough were safe enough, and recurred in spasms, but Greville's interest had been superseded by fresher, more vital stuff; and Richard's

occasional starts on an abstract subject were, curiously, addressed more to an absent David than to Greville :—" Have you ever noticed how nearly all the popular songs they sing have something in 'em about a long long way or long long trails ? " he remarked once, as a chorus from a khaki group in the distance floated to them in wind-borne snatches. " A long, long road in Flanders or France, straight and planted with poplars . . . tired men dragging on and on with a sense of endlessness like in a Nevinson picture—but it's queer that it should have worked its way into the very songs."

Greville knew little of roads and cared less.

They were at the moment on the outskirts of a neighbouring town ; a road of detached houses, picturesque and gabled : each so fretfully and laboriously different, and all so drearily alike. All of these bore their names painted on the gates ; and one was " Heimat." Richard's lower lip twisted sardonically. . . . " Heimat "—home—after three years of war with Germany ! Who in their simplicity had dared leave such a name displayed ? A wistful group of exiles from the Vaterland, who still clung to their own tongue, wore plaid, and basket plaits, and stupid socks, drank coffee for breakfast, and sang in chorus round the piano after dinner ?—No—they would have called their house Omdurman or the Cedars or Kenilworth ; was it likely that a second Otto Redbury would have the temerity to dwell behind a gate with " Heimat " painted boldly upon it—" In our position—" ? Heimat probably sheltered a serenely unconscious English family, who accepted the rum name they found when they moved in, and pronounced it wrong—and who could with safety have dwelt in a house called " Kaiser Wilhelm " and still not meet with suspicion. Perhaps they had an ancient German governess whom they tolerated and sheltered for pre-war sake, and she guarded in her sentimental old rag-bag of a heart the secret understanding of " Heimat," and found comfort in it. . . .

Greville, who had not noticed the house called Heimat, interrupted his companion's musings : " I say, did you hear old Rogers has had both his legs shot away ? "

" Bad luck ! We beat Dumfield by an innings when he was captain."

" Yes ; he wasn't a patch on Rothenburg, though. D'you remember Rothenburg ? "

Yes—Richard remembered Con.

"German name, wasn't it? What happened to him?"

"D.S.O. and killed at Vimy," briefly. He wondered if Greville, like Mr Gryce, was going to say "ought to have been interned"? Even the subject of Winborough was perilous, might lead to . . . the admission they all sought to drag from his sensitive reluctance.

For this was the latest result of Richard's nerves, that he imagined a conspiracy on the part of the Dunne household to make him utter aloud—scream aloud—the fact that he was a German. Therefore he set stern watch upon his speech, though never doubting they would win their point in the end. . . . "Morose beggar!" commented young Frank. "Molly's coming to-morrow—we'll see if *she* wakes him up a bit!"

"Frank, I don't want you to tell Molly about Richard."

"What—not that he's a blooming——"

"No, dear."

"Why, Mater? Strikes me Molly ought to be put on guard. She might want to marry him. Nice old fizzle that 'ud be."

Mrs Dunne seriously replied that he might trust her to be responsible for the safeguarding of Molly (aged fifteen) from contraction of an alliance with the enemy.

"Are you going in the R.F.C., Richard?" asked Molly, on her first morning.

They were in the orchard, and her mouth was stained a deep plum-purple.

"No."

"You said last year—no, the year before that, wasn't it?—that you weren't keen on anything except a commission in the Flying Corps. And I was going to work the wings and 'per ardua ad astra' on a silk handkerchief for you. Lucky I didn't."

"Plenty of chaps you could have given it to."

Molly fastened strong pointed teeth into the downy blue of yet another plum; and then asked: "Are you going into the R.E.?"

"No."

"Gunner, then?"

"No."

"What are you going to be when you join up?"

"I'm not joining up."

"White feather!" she flashed at him. She had been in-

clined to regard Richard as her especial property, whenever they had met at Market Cottage. Though he had teased her a lot, he was always rather more gentle in action where she was concerned, than Greville and Frank. So that she was not prepared now, when in a fit of passion he seized her by the shoulders and shook her—shook her—" You little beast——"

His fingers dug deep into her shoulders ; she tried with a sudden jerk to twist out of his grasp . . . could not. . . . Then with quite a good exhibition of resource, tore an over-ripe plum from a bough near at hand and flung it in Richard's face—" Hun ! "

" That's right," he said coolly, releasing her. " Traitor if you like—spy and coward," and he grinned at her mute amazement. Suddenly, in a queer, vicious sort of way he was enjoying the scene. " You've guessed it, Molly. Only a Hun would grab a girl and shake her. I'd be happy dropping bombs on babies, too ; and shooting a half-drowned non-combatant in the water. We're all like that. And I'd be happy——" he stopped, and looked at the girl ; a shifting ray of sun through the leaves struck her across the face ; across the half-parted plum-stained lips ; showed him the angry gold freckling her big brown eyes. A tomboy in blue serge with rough chestnut hair . . . yes, but a promise of more than that . . . for him.

He moved towards her—and quickly she plucked another dark mauve globule.

" Drop that."

" Hun ! Hun ! Hun ! " she taunted him.

" There are things one can't help, Molly—and there are also too many things you don't even begin to understand, Molly—That's why you're no good to me, just at present. One day, when I've time, I may bother to make you understand. Or I may not. Meanwhile——" His arm sprang up against the whizzing plum, averted it, dragged her into his arms and kissed her roughly . . . then more tenderly. . . . She was passive, recognizing with wonder that this was suddenly not an uncouth bullying schoolboy, but a man dogged and fierce and rather unwilling, who had captured her defiance and stilled it.

But what rubbish ! Richard ! Why, he was only eighteen ; younger than Grev—and Grev was certainly not yet a man, though he had fought. . . . Richard had not even fought—the colour stung her brown skin into red, as she recalled his

contempt: "There are too many things you don't even begin to understand, Molly——'

"I don't care! I don't care!" she raged in a whisper.

"I don't care either," came the answer in that cool man-voice, which reason could hardly yet accept as belonging to Richard; "but if I ever do care, Molly, then I'll damned well marry you, and you'll have a Hun for a husband whether you want it or not—so you'd better be more polite now. . . ."

"I won't—you shan't—never—let me go, Richard!"

"Kiss me first, then. I like your kisses though I don't like you."

In a final twist for liberty, she slewed her head backwards . . . . and saw his eyes, sad light eyes narrowed under their bending ridges—something like a tumbler pigeon turned wildly over and over in her breast. . . . With a gasp, she offered him her childish fruit-stained lips . . . and darted away between the orchard trees.

Richard pressed his two clenched fists against his forehead. . . .

"What did I say to her?—looks as though I were going mad. . . ." A portion of himself seemed to slide coldly away from the rest—and then be jerked again into its place . . . it was a nasty sensation; and so was the shame with which he submitted to the fact that he had no control whatever over any juggling tricks his brain and body in goblin collaboration might choose to play him.

A conviction, for instance, that a number of people in assembly held a threat and a menace for him . . . slow horror which the mind communicated to the flesh—he could not keep still between walls and floor and ceiling, with people crushing him round and stifling him, blocking his exit—with people's voices droning like wasps . . . the heavy persistent circling motion of wasps over food . . . yes, he had to get away, if he was to breathe, if he was to live . . . his head, his eyes, his ears and neck, his wrists and finger-tips and knees, each held their separate hammering pulse—how could he sit quietly in a chair, at a table, with all these fever-pulses dinning and throbbing in unequal measure, and that one great pulse in his left side swinging dominion over the others—he must get into the open, or die, there, before them all, before Greville's bewilderment, and Frank's loud disdain, and Molly crying, "Hun! Hun! Hun!" . . . he preferred to die alone.

"I ought to go home——" but home was more meals in

public, and Mr Gryce, and traffic, and pavements a-swirl with people. Only a few days more now—only to-morrow and the day after—only to-morrow—and horror itself would be there, in place of horror anticipated. How would it be when he needed to run—and ran up against barbed wire—and was turned back . . . enclosed and ringed by barbed wire? *Senseless* barbed wire—had it been enemy fencing, you might cut it, break through and into enemy trench, bring a rifle smashing down on a fat pink head . . . Prussian head . . . pink head . . . mud and filth and the swarm of lice, and oozy, sticky blood, and cold, wet cold. . . . This was France—war—his birthright—birthright of everybody growing from 1914 into manhood. Oh, damn . . . that hot swollen feeling round his temples again—no, not inside—round the outside. . . and why did they try so hard to hypnotize him into declaring aloud that he was a German? even Mrs Dunne, even Greville . . . and Frank of course, with Molly now his partner and confederate. They were all jolly and serene and happy enough—couldn't they leave him alone? They and the chintz sitting-room and that—that stranger dining with them this Sunday after church. Who was it? The local doctor? Dr Greyson? He had not brought his wife . . . apologized, said she had a cold; Richard knew—he did not care to bring her into a house where a German was staying; she might have to shake hands with him, and she had vowed not to shake hands with a German again—so she had preferred to stay at home. The Dunnes had talked of asking a Mr Rhodes and his son and daughter—very decent people, Richard remembered them from last time . . . and then the question of inviting them had suddenly been abandoned, with a great show of tact on Mrs Dunne's part—"perhaps they would not care to come out so soon after poor Hal's death"—but again Richard suspected the confidential after-discussion between Greville and his mother. "Better not, Mater, while Richard's here; he's going to-morrow. But they're the sort who'd *mind*. . . ."

. . . Would Frank never stop eating pudding? apple suet pudding—two helpings already, and now a third. Frank did it on purpose—fiendishly—he knew Richard was mad to get up and out of the cramped cramping space. . . .

"Coffee in the sitting-room, I think," Mrs Dunne proposed at last; "such a pity it's raining, or we might have sat outside."

They all moved together, glucose in conviviality, towards the room which held the portrait of Commander Dunne. Greville, in his simple, eager way was explaining some aviation technicality to Doctor Greyson, who listened respectfully.

"These youngsters—they're showing us all the way!" he smiled at Frank in his blue and gold, at Molly wearing her Girl Guide uniform—his eye swept over Richard blankly—he knew then? They had told him, or he must have remarked on all that square muscularity clothed in mufti. . . . Voices like persistent wasps . . . the pursuing threat was in the room with him now . . . it was always worst in here . . . with the picture of Commander Antony Dunne. What was the Doctor saying? something about the German prisoners employed to work on a farm in the neighbourhood . . . but that was part of the plot, to goad him into his declaration—to lead the talk that way . . . part of the plot. . . .

"They're lazy swine, you know; won't do a stroke of work when the overseer's back is turned——"

"Why should they?" demanded Richard.

The wasp-drone hushed now; faces all turned towards him, curious to hear—the plot was working as anticipated.

Fool! why had he spoken? . . . that cursed new trick of seeing things all round and from the other side. But he went on, doggedly: "Do you suppose that if I were an English prisoner in Germany that I'd do one more stroke of work on their damned alien soil than would be forced out of me?"

Molly and Frank exchanged a quick look. And Greville frowned uneasily. Then Dr Greyson said, with perfect courtesy: "It's rather difficult, I imagine, for anyone who is not entirely one of us to appreciate our point of view. For you're not quite English, are you, Mr Marcus?"

He knew! . . . he knew well enough—he only put the question to drag out his answer—he should have it then! . . . Frank smiled meaningly at Molly. . . . Richard saw him—and the room, the little chintz sitting-room which was all England, was glad, glad, glad at his impending humiliation. . . . Nerves drawn tighter and tighter—then they twanged apart, burst strings—"You're not quite English, are you, Mr Marcus?"

"No," Richard screamed suddenly, "I'm a German. And I hate the English—I hate them——"

It was not true. As he rushed for the door, and down the

passage and out into the garden, all that was left sane in him denied the cry; he did not hate the English—loved them—wanted to be like them—wanted to belong to them—fight for them. But they had pushed him into the lie. And now he could not live, having said it . . . the sea was somewhere . . . he would run till he got to the sea. . . .

The pad of footsteps in his rear . . . he plunged forward, slipping on the soaked ground. . . . More footsteps, louder—only let him get away—if there were no shock of barbed wire ahead to stay him . . . he would escape the barbed wire, escape the mob that since two and a half years had been hounding behind him . . . never so close as now. . . . "Schnabel! Schnabel!" soft rain blowing across his face . . . head down, arms pressed against his sides, breath sobbing fiercely, he ran on in a blind panic. . . .

"I can't catch up with the beggar," said Greville, returning to the sitting-room. "I called him, too. . . . I s'pose he'll come back all right?"

CHAPTER VI

I

Why had he not thought of suicide before this? Looked upon calmly and dispassionately, from a merely business aspect, it was the only course for him—lacking the vital sustenance which men drew nowadays from love of their own land. It annoyed Richard that even though he had reached the sea, the sea was nowhere in sight—lost behind wide flats of mud. He leant against the rail which divided the path beside the railway from a strip of coarse sand, sullenly determined not to plunge across all that marsh till he found deep enough water to drown him; even suicide, it seemed, was to be a difficulty and a favour;—well, the sea could come to him—he would wait for the returning tide.

He must have run more than five miles; that was all he knew of his whereabouts. For when he registered, it was made clear that for him the Essex coast was prohibited area. Leigh was evidently the name of this little estuary town he had struck haphazard. There would be half a column in the local paper: "Enemy alien drowns himself." . . . Perhaps two lines in the London Press, amongst other minor items of news.

Richard stared horizon-wards where might be the dilatory tide of his desire. He was now peaceful, almost numb in mind and body, caring little for recent turmoil, where so soon blankness was to be. He wondered dispassionately as to the time? About six o'clock, to judge by the western pyramid of opaque storm-grey cloud, a pale yellow sun breaking its peak into fragments and spilling itself in shaft after shaft of dim light down the triangle and on to the illimitable green and brown and fawn, burnishing it to a glimmering fantasy like the hues of a mackerel. Patches of blue sky were reflected in purple pools. And areas of mud were almost invisible for ships, their keels deeply embedded, as though a whole lurching

fleet had suddenly flung themselves on their sides and were impotent . . . ropes and nets and sails and tackle, old tubs and steamers and hulks. The scene was packed and spiked with masts. Behind the station, and its creak and flap of signals and gates and coal-trucks, a purple gasometer seemed to have entangled itself beyond redemption into the mournful landscape; and from an outjutting breakwater, the black finger of a donkey-engine pointed darkly, accusingly against the sky. The tide had turned, somewhere far out there; and in monotonous procession up a narrow flowing squiggle of silvery grey, the fishing-boats came in; their unclothed masts still gauntly upright; small dark figures of men hauling with ropes on either side, or gently paddling from the stern; small dark figures, penguin-height, standing patiently in rows on the mud, to receive the loads of fish. Round each dwindling bend another boat could be sighted; they might come in thus for ever, with nothing to break their soundless even progress. The sky was all grey now, and the grey and brown of the marshes hardly touched to pearliness. A throb in the air loudened, as a grey steel airship came pounding, slow and enormous, across the foreground. Dagon, god of fish . . . god significant of grey steel wars. . . .

From lethargic contemplation, Richard was being imperceptibly hypnotized by the subtle rhythmic excitement that pervades and hangs about an estuary; estuary which is not quite the sea; which leads to the sea; which opens out so wildly and generously from the mere width of a river. The fishing-hauls were in, and the men had vanished from the marsh; but to him it was still as though boat after boat were following the curve of the inflowing stream . . . but dimly visible now . . . the air was full of windless dusk, and a quiver shook the keels of the mud-locked fleet; soon they would begin to stir and lift. . . .

II

The scream of a siren punctured the calm. Another one, from much nearer at hand, pressed down and swallowed the first long raucous shock of sound.

Richard knew the two blasts were signals of an air-raid impending. He had heard the Dunnes discussing the possi-

bility of several during this week of harvest moon. A few lingering footsteps pattered to sudden quickness and silence. In the little town at his back, and all along the coast, he was aware of no panic, but of every person on the defensive; sucked back behind walls and shutters and curtains; braced to sturdy sensible resistance of the chance-monster and its grim selection. In the morning the population would emerge and stand about and gossip clamorously, with frequent repetition of the phrase: "Well, I was just——" "Yes, and I was just——" But now, all activity withdrawn and waiting. . . .

Richard waited too, a few moments. Then, impatient of immobility, strolled along the path on his right. He was impressed by the absence of fuss on the part of the civil population. All very well for him who had no more fastenings on life; but these ordinary people appeared to take it so for granted that they should be disturbed in the midst of their daily business, to an encounter with such grotesque apparition as bombs and shrapnel and aerial torpedoes. . . . Their behaviour roused him to the same queer beating tenderness as when the blind discharged soldiers at the music-hall had been "still keen on things." Some people were rather fine. . . . English people . . . but he had declared out loud that he hated the English . . . and so he had to die.

He went past the gas-works, and along the sea-wall which meandered through the marshes. Open country all around him now, and no noise but the swish of rushes, far-off gurgle and squirt of water, occasional plop of some small animal into the spreading pools. Was there always this black gaping rent of silence between the signal and the first gun-mutterings? It was Richard's unique experience of an air-raid outside London; and an air-raid in London he had considered was altogether a second-rate affair.

"First line of defence," he remembered Greville had called the belt of fortresses—Sheerness, Shoeburyness, Canvey Island, Tilbury and Gravesend. He strained his eyes towards the angles of crouching coast-line opposite him, in vain effort to distinguish them. First line of defence, he repeated once or twice exultantly—before he pulled himself up as a fool. What did such trivialities concern him now?

Hallo—was that firing out there? No.

Yes.

Or a dog barking?

Richard told himself persistently it was only a dog barking, to smother the quality of vital contentment newborn in him and uprising with the nearer and yet nearer sound of the guns.

The darkness was lit with sinking star-shells; and through the thin white light which the rising half-moon spread over the estuary, the inland flight of little winged machines was clearly and delicately visible.

Richard stood stock-still, staring at these, till, in a surge of wild indignation, he found himself starkly confronted with the fact that they were the Gothas, and that they were over an English river, carrying death to an English city.

"Damn their insolence!" he shouted into the sky. "It's *our* land——"

Our land, fizzing in a nightmare of flame; drowned in great gun-thunders. And these small black figures busy with their evening's haul of fish not an hour ago, *our* fisherfolk—could we prevent them from being torn and hurt?

"Oh, Christ—that's good!" as the barrage crashed from every side at once; and the giant gun on Canvey Island mouthed and reverberated above all the rest. *Our* barrage! . . . To Hell with these invaders. . . .

Richard was all right. His at last, that blessed bias on the vision which he had forfeited, and so desperately sought. He was, thank God, incapable now of reason or justice or sanity—unconscious of himself and his position, oblivious of an enemy point of view. Just English for all he was worth. One man for one land. A patriot . . . and—*in* it! . . . He forgot that he was alone; the rending chaos all about him gave him the illusion of being a central participant; so his solitary figure jigged and capered on the flat sea-wall with incoherent vocal splutter of encouragement and fury and a very delirium of pleasure.

A shape of yellowish drab came scuttling along the wall, arms thrown up to shield the face. . . . "Hallo—look ahead!" Richard called warningly—then threw out his hand and clutched at the slipping figure. "You were nearly down then—I say, what's the matter with you?" for the little soldier was clinging to him in a very frenzy of terror, with prayer and sob and blasphemy mingled. . . .

"Oo—er—O Jesus, the blarsted noise again . . . don't let 'em—don't lemme go—I ain't a coward, sir, 'streuth I'm

not—bin two years in the trenches—but them guns fair do somefink to the inside of me 'ead. . . . Ow—er——" he fell writhing and vomiting to the ground beside Richard, as the barrage appeared to have enclosed a stray Gotha, and shook the four sides of the world with triumphant yelps and rumblings.

" Shell-shock," muttered Richard. " Corporal by his stripes and—by Jove ! Military Medal "—as a twist of khaki tunic into the moonlight revealed a strip of ribbon sewn on to the man's meagre chest.

He was suddenly guilty and ashamed of his own arrogance of calm. This sort of wreck was what the war made of some of its heroes ; " this is what the war ought to have made of me " . . . he should have been blind with the St Dunstan's men : broken like the little cockney soldier from France, cowering here beside him. His mind and body and five senses whole and immune, were dishonour.

Richard knelt and took firm grip of the twitching wrists. " It's all right," gruffly. " Listen—they're getting away towards London ; we shall have quiet for a bit."

" Till they come back," sobbed the man, but he trembled less violently, and presently drew himself up to a sitting posture.

" Discharged ' fit ' from 'orspital larst week," he whispered, lips trembling to a rueful smile. His peaked, freckled face was glistening with sweat, and his fingers still tore at the grass ; but he was making an effort at control. " Doc told me I shouldn't get another o' these 'ere attacks, but—I dunno—it's the s'noise wot did it. I was walkin' over quiet-like from Benfleet—luvly evenin' an' all—when that bloomin' siren went and gave me fits an' I begun to run." His voice conveyed apology, and Richard flushed crimson.

" It's all right," he repeated awkwardly ; " where do you want to get ? "

" H'under cover," said the Corporal with distinct emphasis. " We're nearer Leigh, I b'lieve, than Benfleet ; might make a dash for 'ome sweet 'ome before. . . . Oh, Gawd ! *don't, don't,*" as a fresh growling outbreak from the Sheerness guns signified the approach up the Thames of a second batch of raiders.

Cover ? Richard looked round the landscape ; it was entirely exposed ; not even a tree ; nothing humped from the flat marshes except a few old derelict boats reversed in the

mud ; one of them at the foot of the slope where now they lay.

" Better than nothing ! " It might at least be suggestive of shelter to his companion, even if of no actual protection from shrapnel. Richard leapt down from the wall, and plunged up to his knees in mud, tugged at the boat with all his welded strength of shoulder and muscle.

" 'Ere—you're not gawn ? " he heard whimpered during a lull in the barrage. And " Rather not ! " he shouted back, reassuringly ; and succeeded in tilting the half-rotten boards so that the bows rested against the slope while the stern remained still embedded ; thus the concave bottom of the boat roofed a small dark space—an amateur dug-out.

Meanwhile, the second raiders were not suffered to pursue their leaders to London ; the barrage waxed fiercer, shutting them in, driving them from point to point ; a few bombs were dropped, and exploded with a dull concussion of sound quite distinct from gun-fire ; and all along the Kent and Essex coast the shrapnel flew screaming.

" Hot stuff ! " laughed Richard, as a moaning hoot snicked past his ears ; he sprang up the bank again, and found the Corporal crying in a quiet agony, too exhausted to budge. Without explanation he lifted him gently ; placed him " under cover " as he had desired. Then he blocked the aperture at the tilt of the boat with his own square stocky build. " Shut your ears with your arms, you won't know anything more about it till the morning," he shouted through the din.

Presently his companion said : " I've just remembered me name—it's Plunkett—Ted Plunkett."

" Oh—yes ? " Richard was rather surprised at the formality in the midst of shell-shock during air-raid.

A pause. Then : " Well—ain't you goin' to tell me your name now I've told you mine ? " reproachfully.

" Richard Marcus."

" R ! Got some pluck, 'aven't you, Sonny Richard Marcus ? "

And amusement twinkled in Richard's deep-set eyes, as he reflected on the quality of pluck needful under bomb-fire by a person out for the express purpose of drowning himself.

" Ever heard the comic story of the servant who had never seen the sea ? " he replied with seeming irrelevance, but thinking how the tide had temporarily baulked his intentions. " She was so dead keen on seeing it that she stole her mistress'

jewels to pay for the fare to Southend—and then they arrested her while she was waiting for the tide to come up."

"Fair did 'er in!" commented Corporal Plunkett, laughing weakly. "Less row now, ain't it?"

"Some of our chaps gone up, I should say. Yes—listen!" as a succession of quick staccato bangs were knocked out directly overhead, then echoed a little farther off.

The Corporal subsided, crouching his dazed tormented head deep into his arms. And Richard, with his hands clasped round his knees, waited through the ensuing drawn-out silence for the distant inland throb which would easily mean the return of the first batch of raiders from London. He longed with eagerness for the renewed sound of gun-firing; it definitely slaked a thirst in him that had craved for such satisfaction since three years. Well—he had not been able to go to the war, but a little bit of the war had come to him. . . . God was—not so bad, after all! He was happy, sitting there waiting.

"There they are!" And at the same moment he felt a warm trickle down his neck. "Cheerio! wounded in action!" that bit of shrapnel which had scraped so close to his ear, must have scraped closer than he had noticed at the time.

"Yes, there they are—with a vengeance!"

. . . In the subsequent transformation of earth, sky, air and water into sheer noise, he faintly heard his comrade ejaculating "Hell" between intervals of violent sickness. He thrust a stealthy hand into the aperture; it was grabbed and twisted by wet chilly fingers.

"It's all right, y'know," said Richard gruffly. "Quite all right. . . ."

The last Gotha was chased from the mouth of the Thames out to sea. The last mutter of guns died away.

"I daresay it's h'over now." Plunkett emerged cautiously into the moonlight some ten minutes later. "May as well get 'ome," and he staggered to his feet. "The Missus 'll be wondering."

"You think it *is* all over?" Richard was reluctant to believe it. That one nerve in him was still twanging irritably for the relief of gun-fire.

The Corporal nodded. "It'll be 'alf-an-'our or more afore they give the signal. Can't wait for that. You comin'?"

"Where? Back to Leigh?—No, not for the moment. Can you get along by yourself? It isn't far."

" Fit as a fiddle," the other declared. He held out his hand to Richard—" Thank yer, Sonny. . . ."

The boy blurted out, at a reminding prick of the old goad: " I was born in Germany, you know. . . ."

Corporal Plunkett, M.M., was astonished at the inconsequent confession . . . some divine impulse prompted him to the speech that healed. " Lord, sir—*that* don't matter. You're one of us all right ! "

III

. . . The obsession was lifted. Corporal Plunkett had done it. Corporal Plunkett had atoned for Mr Gryce. Never again would Richard turn hot and miserable at the mention of German frightfulness . . . he had no connection with the things the Germans did. Born in Germany, yes, but—" You're one of us all right," the cockney soldier had said. The awful crazed obsession of responsibility was rolled away; and in utter thankfulness Richard lay on the sea-wall that first night of the September air-raids, half-dreaming, content to have heard the guns, content. . . .

He was not going to drown himself. Suicide was surrender without a fighting chance. Richard's sturdier business instinct rejected the proposition. Suicide was stupid—a refuge for weaklings and decadents—he could wrench out better terms for himself. Now that his spirit was fixed for one land and one people, the fact of continued official ostracism hardly counted. He would have to submit to that as to a fact and a nuisance, but in no way vital. . . . Internment ? That also was only official—" I'll just have to get through with it." Richard scowled healthily at the annoying prospect.

But he was out of No Man's Land at last . . . it had been dreary fog-sodden territory, and he was glad, a thousand times glad to be quit of it. Not once again need he set foot there; his love of England was sanctuary. He would love England, not as before, in exacting casual certainty, but with the fierce beating love of a man for the woman who has no love for him, who will never return his love. He would love England in spite of herself, and with a love steadily cognizant of its own hopelessness. And he thought of fireside happiness where passion

was mutual and easy . . . and rejoiced, in new-found defiance, that his body should stand outside, pressed against hard rains and hard storms and hard swerve of the hills.

" But I'll make her take me somehow—in the end——"

A man must have a country to call his own. To *know* his own. So much the war had taught him. Other lessons it might have held for others ; but for him this special groping agony of nowhere belonging.

Internationalism . . . brotherhood . . . that was all very well ; men had hailed it, and believed in it ; had let the careful drawing of boundary be slurred ; had forgotten to set stern limits to their sense of humanity . . . had merged the significance of birthplace to freer, more casual interpretation : The world is my birthplace. . . . Men had wandered, drifted, flung themselves down in alien places. Why not ? The subconscious trust in the brotherhood of nations had urged them to such courses.

And Internationalism had failed them. Each country was tightly puckered again to self-sufficiency. Internationalism had no country to give her devotees during a European war. No country but No Man's Land . . . desolate sodden track without end or beginning, neither land nor sea . . . to Richard, almost asleep, came a vision of the estuary echoed somewhere in space and in deeper shadow . . greyer fog . . . shapes stumbling about it, hunting for cover, some wailing loudly, some silent and bewildered. . . . He was himself a wraith, one of the betrayed . . . and there were others vaguely familiar. . . .

Voices calling, and receiving no answer, calling again and again . . . red-cheeked waiters, vaguely seen in pre-war days, vaguely disappeared after 1914—they were all here, paler now. . . . And here the cobbler to whom Richard had given Aunt Stella's shoes . . . and Trudchen and her sister Anna, seeking each other, missing each other. . . . Otto Rothenburg squealing loudly that he was British. . . . And now Richard, in his travellings, bumped up against Gottlieb Schnabel, who shrank from him and shrank away into the murky gloom . . . and turned into Captain Dreyfus—" I wonder why ? " That legendary soldier who had killed his own brother on the opposite side—he was native of No Man's Land ; and his brother, the sticky brown gouts dripping from both his shot arms—And : " You here too ? " said Thomas Spalding to Richard, and held

out a hand. . . . A cloud of fog seemed to roll between them. . . . Thomas Spalding was lost again.

Children of No Man's Land—of Denmark and Norway and Sweden and Spain and Holland, entangled haphazard in one belligerent country or another, condemned haphazard as pro-German, pro-English. . . . Their bewildered avowals disbelieved and mocked. . . . "Who are the neutrals? there are no neutrals—the world is at war. . . ." Born in one place, reared in another, married in a third—"which is your country?" No Man's Land is their country . . . we shall meet them in No Man's Land. . . . "An artist has no country" —artists without number groping their way through No Man's Land, thinking they are walking straight ahead and out of it, not knowing that in the darkness and the smiting din they are walking round and round in circles. . . .

"I have no son!" voice sombre and deep from the shadows; a proud old man, this, naturalized English, hating Germany, eighteen-forty-eight refugee. . . . He sent his son to be killed at Gallipoli, and now they are interrogating his loyalty—"Have you a son at the Front?" "I have no son!" He will be accepted at his own word and valuation, or not at all. The dead boy is too dear to stand for mere pledge and security. . . .

Little distracted figures plunging hither and thither, some of them frantically waving a sheet of paper—"Look—Look," but there is no escape from No Man's Land by naturalization . . . in despair the papers are thrown away—flutter whitely in the gloom "like a paper-chase," Richard thinks.

He is hunting for David, in frantic need of comradeship. "Is it you? Or you?" thrusting away each white distorted face as it looms towards him. But David is not here—David was once of No Man's Land, but now no more. . . . Zion has him, wholly and completely. David is a Jew, and the Jews have been granted a cause and a kingdom. . . . Of no avail to seek for David in these grey spectral fogs. The noise is louder and louder—no definite sound, but an intensified cosmic thudding which can be heard when body and soul are alone and listening. . . . Richard is aware of loneliness drenching him like vast breakers—must he stay here for ever?

"Lord, sir—*that* don't matter . . . you're one of us all right!" It is Corporal Plunkett's voice which bursts the

nightmare vision . . . and drags him back to the sea-wall by the estuary. . . .

One day men would dare to wander again, and dare to pitch their tents in strange places . . . but not those who had once been victims ; not Richard Marcus, nor his sons, nor his sons' sons, he vowed grimly. . . .

And with that came the idea to dig himself in. And with the idea, determination.

He would marry—Molly, perhaps. . . . A sort of quick ripple seemed to pass over the world when he thought of Molly and of his savage outburst with her in the orchard. He would marry her—as he had said then, whether she liked it or not—and their son should be born in England, brought up in England, owning land in England ; he should be reared to no ideas that were not purely insular ; and he in his turn should marry an English girl, and their son—would he be enough Englishman yet to be allowed to tolerate foreigners ? Or must that safer, easier attitude wait for the son of his son's son ? How many generations did it take to plant a man securely, son of the soil ?

Retrogressive, all this. The result of the war. Who could afford, after such drastic teaching, again to omit patriotism from fundamental need ?

Richard began to muse on just how fundamental was the need ; and how much slapped on from the surface, by suggestion ? What was patriotism ? He had first asked himself this on a certain evening of shock, three years ago ; and had since only succeeded in discovering, very thoroughly, what was the lack of it.

Sense of property, to start with . . . but that presupposed actual ownership ; that a farmer, a landed proprietor, was more directly inspired to fight for England, than—oh, than cockney Corporal Plunkett, who was probably serving in a shop before the call came.

Birthplace, then ?—But Richard himself could answer the question of how much that mattered to the soul. . . . The law was surely overstressing topography. . . . The law was polishing a hollow shell of sentimentality. David—David was nearer truth when he defined patriotism as the sense of family : son of our house ; thence to local fanaticism : sons of our village—and sons of our country, which was patriotism . . .

but it must stop there. . . . Sons of our five continents . . . it sounded chilly, expanded so far. Internationalism again—Richard, denying it, yet could not prevent thought from crashing up against it from time to time. . . . One day, yes—but the soul must first catch cold in the pursuit of it.

What was patriotism? unity of pride in the nation's slow-born history and tradition? Impetus of divine fury which springs from sanctuary violated? . . . He remembered his rage as the Gothas headed their insolent course straight up the Thames—"*My* Thames" . . . he looked down the estuary towards the sea . . . loving it . . . looked up the river past Benfleet . . . good British name that, pungent with jolly naval tradition . . . his inward sight followed the dwindling stream through London, a draped lady stepping delicately beneath crossed blades of silver, searchlights that protected her . . . and still farther up lay the Thames valley, noontide of green and gold drowsing gardens, and the glory of ancient woods. . . . "My Thames!"

Suddenly Richard flung back his head and laughed, heartily and with no trace of bitterness, at the mere idea that he could love it less because his mother happened to be somewhere else than here at the hour of his birth. It was—so entirely ridiculous! Screaming little red-faced atom . . . what possible difference could it make to him, sucking at his bottle, if Hun-land or home-land were beyond the windows? . . . A world constructed on the arbitrary basis that each person must be screwed down solemnly and with ritual, in residence and in feeling, to the consecrated spot in which he was born, was really not unlike a Gilbert and Sullivan opera.

Of course there was the old argument of "blood tells." *Did* it? His sudden rushing worship of the river-god disproved the argument wholly. For if he were no individual person, but the compound of his ancestors' emotions, the Thames would bore him, and the thought of the Rhine stir him to unutterable pæans.

Thus Richard—he not knowing how a little shy German boy had once crossed to England, and worn a blazer, and sculled in a queer ecstasy from Bray to Cookham. Richard's love of the Thames was a heritage from Ferdie. . . .

"I can't get hold of it—quite——" the boy decided at last, abandoning his quest for patriotism defined. "But it's there——" There, elusively, tormentingly woven into the

fabric itself; distinct from patriotism exploited, talked about, and sung about, and worked up into posters and pictures . . . till it tasted like wood in the mouth. "Can't a man serve his land unquestioningly, without all this cant?" But no emotion could be left deep-hid and dimly private—not love of art, nor love of child, nor love of man for woman . . . patriotism must be thumbed with the rest, till its name was Jingoism. "A patriot for lost causes, and a Jingo after victory—that's the difference. . . ." Had David said so? It sounded like David. . . . Richard had not quite realized as yet how awakened by circumstances was his own powerful, slow-moving brain.

The suck of water startlingly near. . . . He raised himself on one elbow, then sprang to his feet, and saw the tide was up, flowing in clear, luminous black over the marshes, oozing greedily into each hole and inlet, lapping at the very foot of the sea-wall. The bump of lifted boats was audible in the moonless night.

Richard reflected, not without humour, that the sea had emerged from obscurity rather too late to be of any practical value—to him.

He looked at his watch—ten minutes after midnight. Then—he was eighteen to-day! . . . and the dreaded evening would see him in prison—"Rum sort of birthday!"—But horror had all been drained out of the coming ordeal, leaving it, well—a nuisance, nothing more odious nor festering. A confounded nuisance—but inevitable; neither the fault of those interned nor of those who interned them; just a happening out of greater happenings.

The last London train from Leigh would have gone by now; he might catch an early morning workmen's train. He did not want to go back to the Dunnes—grimaced slightly at the mere idea of encounter, with his burst of madness so very recent in their minds. Why—he had come rushing out minus even his cap; they could pack his bag and send it up to Montague Hall . . . not that he would need anything much for the next year or two . . . or for however long this dreary war was going to last.

And after the war——?

"Let 'em go back to their own country—we don't want 'em here." But, "This *is* my country. . . ." Richard stood on the sea-wall, an obstinate figure, black against the dim flat

wash of water. He was smiling a little ironically at the thought of Mr Gryce . . . voice creaking in the hall as he came in: "Intern 'em all!"—and how he would exult on hearing the next day that one more enemy alien had indeed been interned! . . .

Suddenly, and with an unexpected tearing at the heart, three long-drawn-out hoots of the siren shrieked across the swamp, a pause between each, as though the deliverer were holding his breath. Then, all along the English coast, the pent-up tension relaxed, and "We can go to bed," said the English people. "That's the All Clear!"

. . . The boy threw himself full length on the coarse grass; lay with bare head pillowed on his arm; the same faint smile still twisting his underlip:

"May as well get some sleep now," said Richard. "That's the All Clear."

The Novels of
Dorothy Richardson

By MAY SINCLAIR

. . . By imposing very strict limitations on herself she has brought her art, her method, to a high pitch of perfection, so that her form seems to be newer than it perhaps is. She herself is unaware of the perfection of her method. She would probably deny that she has written with any deliberate method at all. She would say: "I only know there are certain things I mustn't do if I was to do what I wanted." Obviously, she must not interfere; she must not analyse or comment or explain. Rather less obviously, she must not tell a story, or handle a situation, or set a scene; she must avoid drama as she avoids narration. And there are some things she must not be. She must not be the wise, all-knowing author. She must be Miriam Henderson. She must not know or divine anything that Miriam does not know or divine; she must not see anything that Miriam does not see. She has taken Miriam's nature upon her. She is not concerned, in the way that other novelists are concerned, with character. Of the persons who move through Miriam's world you know nothing but what Miriam knows. If Miriam is mistaken, well, she and not Miss Richardson is mistaken. Miriam is an acute observer, but she is very far from seeing the whole of these people. They are presented to us in the same vivid but fragmentary way in which they appeared to Miriam, the fragmentary way in which people appear to most of us. Miss Richardson has only imposed on herself the conditions that life imposes on us all. And if you are going to quarrel with those conditions, you will not find her novels satisfactory. But your satisfaction is not her concern.

And I find it impossible to reduce to intelligible terms this satisfaction that I feel. To me these three novels show an art and method and form carried to punctilious perfection. Yet I have heard other novelists say that they have no art and no method and no form, and that it is this formlessness that annoys them. They say that they have no beginning and no middle and no end,

and that to have form a novel must have an end and a beginning and a middle. We have come to words that in more primitive times would have been blows on this subject. There is a certain plausibility in what they say, but it depends on what constitutes a beginning and a middle and an end. In this series there is no drama, no situation, no set scene. Nothing happens. It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's stream of consciousness going on and on. And in neither is there any grossly discernible beginning or middle or end.

In identifying herself with this life, which is Miriam's stream of consciousness, Miss Richardson produces her effect of being the first of getting closer to reality than any of our novelists who are trying so desperately to get close. No attitude or gesture of her own is allowed to come between her and her effect. Whatever her sources and her raw material, she is concerned, and we ought to be concerned solely with the finished result, the work of art. It is to Miriam's almost painfully acute senses that we owe what in any other novelist would be called the "portraits" of Miriam's mother, of her sister Harriett, of the Corries and Joey Banks in *Honeycomb*, of the Miss Pernes and Julia Doyle, and the North London schoolgirls, in *Backwater*, of Fräulein Pfaff and Mademoiselle, of the Martins and Emma Bergmann and Ulrica and "the Australian" in *Pointed Roofs*. The mere "word-painting" is masterly. . . .

It is as if no other writers had ever used their senses so purely and with so intense a joy in their use.

This intensity is the effect of an extreme concentration on the thing seen or felt. Miss Richardson disdains every stroke that does not tell. Her novels are novels of an extraordinary compression, and of an extenuation more extraordinary still. The moments of Miriam's consciousness pass one by one, or overlapping; moments tense with vibration, moments drawn out fine, almost to snapping-point.—*From an article published in "The Egoist," April* 1918.

DOROTHY RICHARDSON

Pointed Roofs

Backwater

Honeycomb

The Tunnel

Interim

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